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FUTURE
PROG 151

Marbles at 20: The making of modern-day

MARILLION

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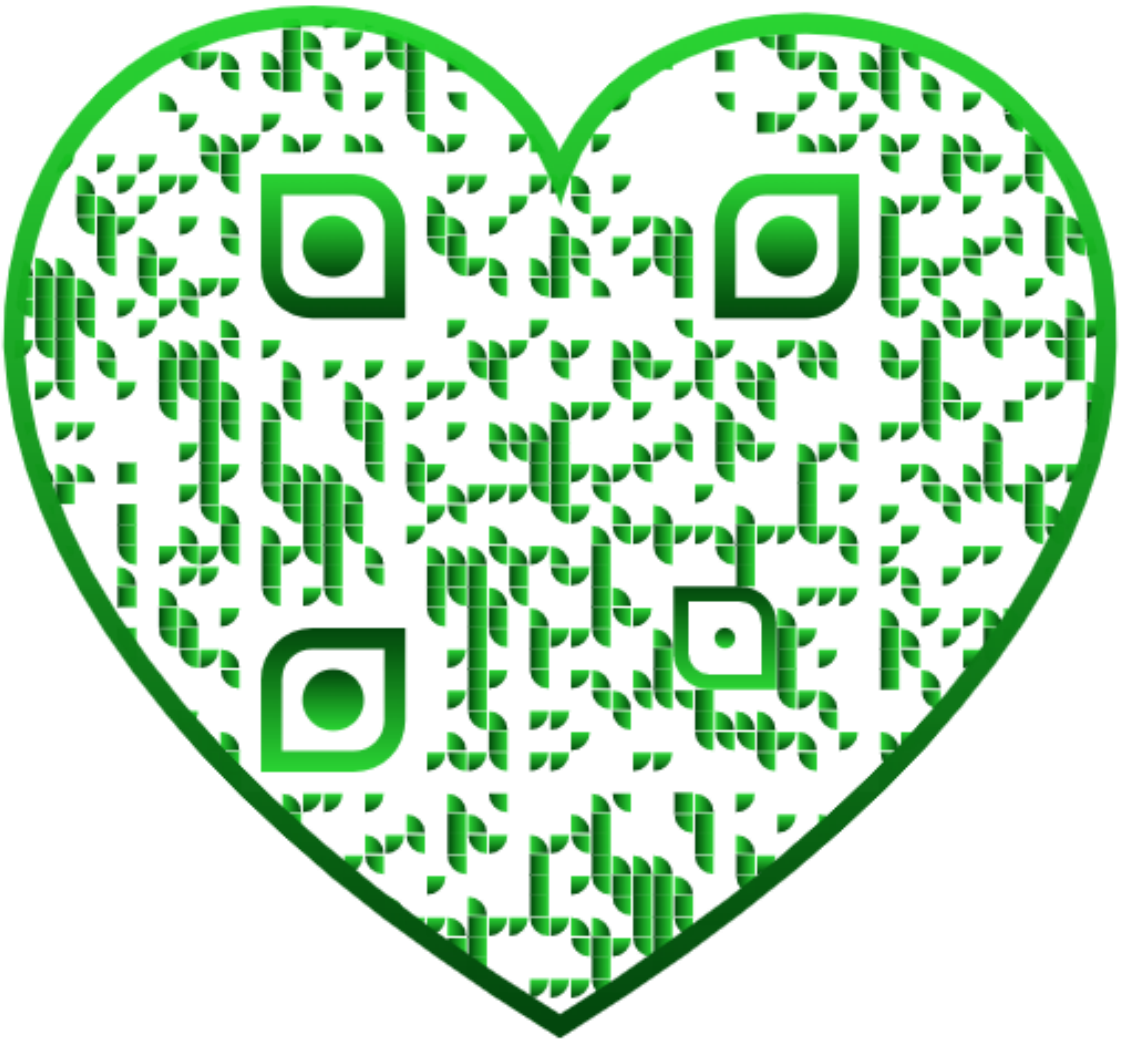

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CARL GLOVER

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"Thank God it was such a good record, or the next few years might have finished us off."

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PROG PRESENTS...

Discovering

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Established in 2007, Esoteric Recordings is the home of progressive, psychedelic and classic rock, with all albums finely packaged and remastered from the best possible sources to ensure the highest audio quality. Distributed by Cherry Red, their releases cover both catalogue reissues and inspiring new works from artists with a fine history and heritage, alongside selected new albums by emerging acts influenced by the breadth of music the label covers. Here's a taste of their roster.

Rosalie Cunningham: musical puzzles galore!

The mighty Steve Hackett and Chris Squire, aka Squackett.

PRESS/MAURIZIO & ANGELA VICEDOMINI

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Young Mother
Taken from *The Albums 1970-1973*

2 Jane Getter Premonition
Division World
Taken from *Division World*

3 Chris Squire
Lucky Seven
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4 Ben Reed
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5 Edgar Broughton
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6 Arthur Brown's Kingdom Come
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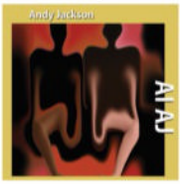

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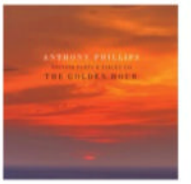

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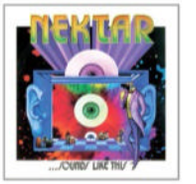

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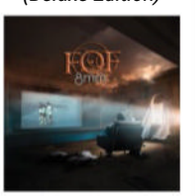

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Ed's Letter

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SCAN HERE TO GET OUR WEEKLY NEWSLETTER

You can subscribe to Prog at www.magazinesdirect.com. See page 112 for further details.

Hello and welcome to the latest issue of *Prog*. Marillion's 13th studio album *Marbles* is 20 years old this year, so we dispatched Philip Wilding off to chat to the band and get the inside scoop on the making of an album which certainly rejuvenated Marillion at the time, and sonically you can draw distinct parallels between *Marbles* and the path they've taken since, especially more recent albums such as *FEAR* and *AHBID*. You can read Philip's detailed examination on page 32.

Elsewhere in this issue we look at the making of Yes's 1994 album *Talk*, explore the story of Decca Records' psych/prog offshoot label Deram, Steven Wilson reveals all about the latest Bass Communion album and Richard Thompson looks back on over 50 years of making music in *The Prog Interview*. And there's the latest from Nordic Giants, Airbag, Marjana Semkina, OU, Louise Patricia Crane, Jane Weaver, Bill Fisher and more, who all bring us up to speed about their latest releases. On top of that, there's a great Esoteric Recordings digital sampler (see page 7), and a Sonicbond Publishing prog e-book – see to the left of the page about how to access this.

I'll sign off by saying how much I enjoyed the second Soundle Festival in its new home of the Key Theatre in Peterborough. A terrific weekend of music and the prog community, well organised, every band played a blinder and the venue staff really did go above and beyond helping anyone out when required. You can read our review in *Prog* 152. The genre is lucky to have these weekends, created by prog fans themselves. If you haven't attended the likes of Soundle Summer/Winter's End, Fusion, Prog For Peart, Nene Valley Rock Festival, Danfest, Prog The Forest and more yet, please consider it. It's helping keep progressive music alive at the grassroots level.

We're back on August 2. Until then, stay safe and prog on...

Jerry Ewing – Editor

NEXT ISSUE AUG 02 ON SALE

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KEYS

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MADE FOR THE LIKES OF US!

Thank you for covering Big Big Train's new album and tour in recent editions. As someone who discovered BBT at about the time of *The Second Brightest Star* and having really enjoyed their subsequent albums (so much so that I now rate BBT as one of my favourite prog bands), I am intrigued by the report of their gig in New Jersey, in *Prog* 149.

Your reviewer tells us that there is an almost complete absence of pieces from the latest album, *The Likes Of Us*, apart from *Love Is The Light*. While your review of the album in *Prog* 147 described *The Likes of Us* as "consolidating" and "a little safe", repeated plays reveal, in my opinion, one of the best prog albums of recent years. It's a stunning piece of work, with some of BBT's best material in years.

On the last UK tour BBT played very few tracks from recent albums. That was a bit disappointing, though the focus on older and well-loved material kept the group's following happy and was perhaps an understandable decision to take in light of David Longdon's passing.

I hope that BBT, with a new lead singer in Alberto Bravin, will have the courage to showcase their new material on the UK leg of their tour later this year. I, for one, want to hear a lot from the new album!

John Sturrock, Edinburgh

A RED MYSTERY

I enjoyed *Prog* 150, but I would criticise one point: I, and my fellow King Crimson fans, would love to know what the lyrics of *Red* mean.

Kieran O'Connor, via email

RUSHING TO HEAR THE LATEST

I was wondering if you have heard any news about Rush 40th Anniversary *Grace Under Pressure* release? Love to hear any news of a release date.

Michael Sine, Burlington, Canada

We've heard there will be a 40th anniversary edition of Grace Under Pressure, and there's also a new release planned for later this year to coincide with the band's 50th anniversary. However, we've not yet received any details as to what the latter might feature. Rest assured that when we do find out, you'll be able to read all about it in Prog — Ed.

Our feature on Crimson's *Red*, but what did it all mean?

Will Big Big Train's latest album get more of an airing at their autumn shows? Watch this space!

PRESS/MASSIMO GOINA

IN FINE VOICE

I would like to compliment Jerry Ewing on an excellent review of Jethro Tull's London Palladium concert [*Prog* 150]. I shared his concerns over Ian Anderson's voice, and, after seeing them twice in 2023, I had suspicions that this tour might be their last, hence why I went to see them at the Palladium, and in Cambridge the following evening.

It didn't take long for my fears to be abated: the opening numbers really were superb. A definite highlight of the Palladium show (but unfortunately not repeated in Cambridge) was *Too Old To Rock'n'Roll, Too Young To Die*. Another difference between the two shows was the merchandise stand at Cambridge was cheaper, and had a wider range.

As for this being their final tour, my fears have proved to be unfounded and I look forward to seeing Tull again at Salisbury Cathedral in December.

In closing, I would like to pay a tribute to King's Lynn's second best-known drummer, Gerry Conway, who died earlier this year. A stalwart of Fairport Convention, he was the drummer on *The Broadsword And The Beast*, which remains to this day my favourite Tull album.

David Flintham, via email

OR SHOULD ANDERSON SHARE THE LOAD?

Having first seen Jethro Tull live in either 1969 or 1970 and having seen them many times since, I was excited to see them again recently in Bristol on their seven decades tour, particularly as I have bought and enjoyed both *RökFlöte* and *The Zealot*

LETTER

PRESS

You made an old (ish!) man very happy when I opened *Prog* 150 to find the digital download devoted entirely to Solstice [pictured]. My Solstice journey is relatively recent, but they have become one of my favourite bands. I hope that the download exposes the band to a much wider audience. They deserve it.

It's thanks to *Prog* that I got into Solstice, as well as many other great bands, including Big Big Train, Riverside, Porcupine Tree and Anathema. More recently I have discovered the joys of the likes of EBB, Squeaky Feet and Northodoxian through the pages of *Prog*. Keep up the good work for the next 150 issues. My ears will like it, even if my wallet takes further dents!

Dave Loweth, via email

We're delighted to hear we've brought some new music to your ears, Dave! We hope you also enjoy this issue's digital sampler, which is devoted to Esoteric Recordings. You'll find it on p7. — Dep. Ed.

This issue's star letter wins a goodie bag from burningshed.com

Gene from their recent output. I was therefore interested in your reviewer's comments about Ian's voice at their Palladium show [*Prog* 150].

In Bristol his voice, whilst undoubtedly suited to the most recent output, did, in my opinion, strain on most of the "classic" songs performed. Having said that, his flute playing is still superb and I suspect he could still strum a mean acoustic guitar even though he doesn't appear to be doing so on the current tour.

Would it be sacrilege to suggest that in future (and I hope he continues to tour for some time yet) he gets someone in to share the vocal load so he can still sing the new stuff, but perhaps concentrate on the flute parts of the older material? After all, Yes have had an alternative vocalist for many years and I was hugely impressed by the way Mollie Marriott sang Yes material with Rick Wakeman on his Caped Crusader gigs. In both cases the performances are enhanced by a younger vocalist who can cover the range.

No offence to Ian but I would love to be able to listen to Tull live without constantly thinking the quality of the vocals isn't quite up to scratch.

Mike Robinson, Bristol

TOP CRUISE

Cruise To The Edge was a fantastic prog event — by miles the biggest and most significant of the year. Not sure why it merits barely a mention in *Prog*? Surely a comprehensive review is called for on an annual basis?

Ken Browne, via email

Cruise To The Edge haven't reached out to the magazine for quite a while now, although when we have covered the event before, be it as a review or a feature, there's just so many bands they all end up reading like a list, which just doesn't really seem to come across as very interesting — Ed.

PRESS/MARTIN WEBB

Jethro Tull at London's Palladium: never too old to rock'n'roll!

PROG

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INTRO

IF IT'S OUT THERE, IT'S IN HERE

LEPROUS READY THEIR "UNIFYING" NINTH ALBUM

The Norwegian modern prog stars reveal a stripped-back but "bigger sounding" album with *Melodies Of Atonement*.

Vocalist Einar Solberg says that Leprous have stripped away the orchestral elements on their new album, *Melodies Of Atonement*, allowing the "character of the band to shine."

Releasing on August 30 via InsideOutMusic, it's the band's first studio album since 2021's *Aphelion* and one that bucks the recent trend of overloading their modern prog template with extra instrumentation. Instead, the band have focused on the talent in their ranks.

"We wanted to see what we can do with the instruments that we have in Leprous, and it's made the album sound bigger," Solberg explains. "By removing some elements, we've made the music much more impactful, so that when we play at maximum dynamics it feels really heavy."

He continues, "Like how a football team will have different players in different positions, it was a case of using each member to their fullest on this album. So, you will see a lot of classic

Leprous: discovering that less can indeed mean much more on their new album.

"We wanted to see what we could do with the instruments that are in Leprous."

Leprous distribution between the guitar parts, with Tor [Oddmund Suhrke] playing all the really deep eight-string guitars, and Robin [Ognedal] playing the funky, higher pitch parts."

Writing began as soon as the first leg of the Aphelion tour concluded in March 2023, with recording wrapped earlier this year. David Castillo, who has produced each of the band's records since 2015's *The Congregation*, returns to the fold once more, and the band believes it "gets the best results when we work together." The Swede has previously worked with Scandinavia prog royalty in Opeth, Katatonia and Soen.

The decision for a stronger internal focus was, in part, dictated by Solberg's blossoming solo career, with a successor to last year's *16* in the works, and a need for distinguishing one from the other increasingly apparent.

"My solo project will heavily focus on orchestral stuff. I've even booked one of the main symphonic orchestras in Norway for the project I'm recording in the fall," the vocalist reveals. "But despite the lack of orchestrations, I think *Melodies Of Atonement* sounds bigger than our previous albums."

As ever, there's no grand concept at play with the band seeking to allow each song to stand on its own right.

"It's the only way I know how to write," Solberg admits. "The lyrics that have gotten the best feedback from our fans have been super-transparent. I will never be an amazing lyricist, but I can write about myself from my point of view. The human mind is quite universal, so I think people will always find something to recognise in their own life. I'm not an intuitive writer; I just need to get something off my mind at that point."

That puts emotions at the heart of a streamlined but hard-hitting record, which the band hope can extend their reach, while still keeping their core fanbase happy.

"I think it will be a quite unifying album, and we think it's our best," Solberg concludes. "It's definitely heavier than previous albums, but it's still got a lot of emotions and catchiness; it's got the Leprous identity. I think it will appeal more to our older fans, but it can also open some new doors for us, too."

The band will play the US with shows in September, and in Europe they're shifting towards a focus on "bigger, more exclusive shows with bigger production," according to Solberg. More details of the tricks that are currently concealed up their sleeves will be revealed in due course.

The album will be available in a number of different formats, including CD and double LP gatefold, with deluxe, limited edition options including a CD mediabook, and two-disc CD and Blu-ray artbook.

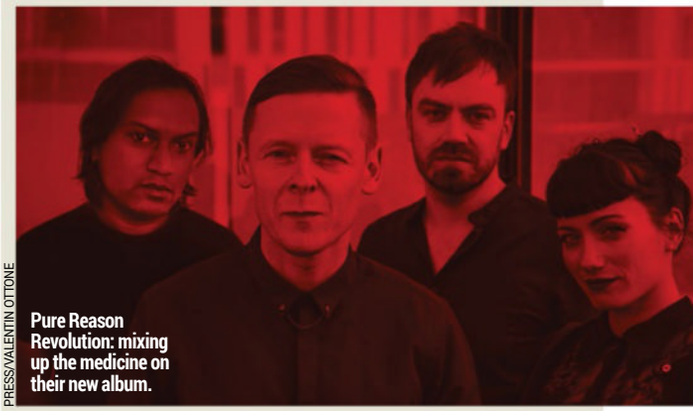
See www.leprous.net for more information, pre-orders and tour dates. **POW**

PRESS/TOMASZ GOTTRYD

This month, Intro was compiled by
Jeremy Allen
Chris Cope
Jerry Ewing
Gary Mackenzie
Rhodri Marsden
Julian Marszalek
James McNair
Natasha Scharf
Johnny Sharp
Francesca Tyer
Phil Weller

THE REBIRTH OF PURE REASON REVOLUTION

Sixth album sees the revised line-up further widen their musical brief.



PRESS/VALENTIN OTTONE

Pure Reason Revolution: mixing up the medicine on their new album.

Pure Reason Revolution have announced the release of their sixth album. *Coming Up To Consciousness*, which is out on September 6 via InsideOutMusic. It's their third since their post-hiatus return in 2020, and according to the band, they've attempted to move into new musical territories by drawing on influences as disparate as Talk Talk, Elliott Smith, The Smile and even Arctic Monkeys, as well as Pink Floyd.

Made up of eight tracks, the album also includes a number of high-profile collaborators. Joining the band on bass for seven of the songs is celebrated session musician Guy Pratt, who has worked with David Gilmour and Nick Mason's Saucerful Of Secrets among many others, while The Pineapple Thief's bassist Jon Sykes provides the low end on the remaining number. His bandmate, Bruce Soord, mixed the album in stereo, Dolby Atmos and 5.1 surround sound. *Coming Up To Consciousness* will be available on limited-edition CD/DVD Digipak (including 5.1 and high-resolution stereo mixes), standard CD jewel case, digital album (also in Dolby Atmos) as well as a limited-edition gatefold coloured vinyl LP.

Pure Reason Revolution will embark on a double-headline European tour with Lesoir this autumn. As well as an appearance at the relaunched Be Prog! My Friend festival in Barcelona, Spain on September 27, they'll play in Germany and France; and have shows in October in the Netherlands at Cpunt in Hoofddorp, ProgPower Europe and 013 in Tilburg.

See www.purereasonrevolutionofficial.com for more. **JM**

GAVIN HARRISON AND ANTOINE FAFARD ARE BACK

Perpetual Motions moves on from the pair's debut album.

Drummer Gavin Harrison – most recently seen in action with The Pineapple Thief and Porcupine Tree – has announced the release of *Perpetual Mutations*, his second collaboration with bassist and guitarist Antoine Fafard, out via Harmonic Heresy on 26 July.

In keeping with the flavour of the album's predecessor, 2020's *Chemical Reactions*, all the music has been performed using real instruments and excludes the use of any programming. The pair also set themselves the brief of not repeating what went on before and have this time thrown Spanish guitars and pianos into the mix. Joining them are a variety of guest musicians including soprano saxophonist Jean-Pierre Zanella, cellists Joasia Cieslak and Isodora Filipovic, violinist Ally Storch, brass player Dake Devoe and Rodrigo Escalona contributing oboe.

Gavin Harrison: teaming up again with Antoine Fafard.

Fans can expect more collaborations, with the pair revealing, "The intention of this project is to stretch out artistic possibilities and contribute to expanding the musical spectrum."

See www.antoinefafard.com. **JM**

PRESS

BOWNESS EXPLORES DIVISION ON SOLO LP

Powder Dry is his first for new label Kscope as he keeps his head in troubled times.

It's the world: Tim Bowness is moved by global events.

PRESS/BRYAN TAYLOR

"I think it's a subconscious reaction to the world we're living in," says Tim Bowness as he ponders the inspiration behind *Powder Dry*, his new solo album, released on August 16 via Kscope, his first for the label.

"Generally speaking, albums either come from a deeply personal and isolated place or it's when you're almost open to what the world is saying to you," continues the singer-songwriter, who's also half of No-Man. "And I think that with the last two or three albums, there's that sense that the world has become slightly more dangerous and slightly more menacing, whether it's Ukraine, whether it's Gaza, whether it's just partisan political debate on social media. Things feel worse and more precarious than at any stage I remember. I don't think I've lived through a time where people seem quite so angry, or quite so divided."

The album's title is a considered response to what he sees as the knee-jerk reactions that pass for public discourse.

"'Keep your powder dry' is an old-fashioned phrase, which means hold on to your temper, hold on to your balance, don't explode and assess what's around you. That's what I try to do, but often I feel that I'm living in a world where there are explosions going off everywhere."

Spread over 16 tracks, *Powder Dry* really is a solo effort with Bowness handling all the singing, instrumentation and production himself. Eschewing collaborative overtures from other musicians, he found that keeping his own counsel proved to be far more productive than he'd anticipated.

"As soon as I started to write, it was an absolute outpouring," he smiles. "Once I started, I couldn't stop. It was very much all about capturing a feeling. I think that the moods are very diverse and there's certainly a fairly extreme range from optimism to bleakness and beauty to noise."

The album is also marked by the brevity of the songs, many of which clock in at less than three minutes.

"It was a happy accident," says Bowness. "These songs are exactly the right length for what's been put into them musically, vocally, lyrically and they capture what I wanted them to capture in that brief form. It felt right to me straightaway."

He adds, "Whenever you make music, you want to move people and excite people and sometimes even challenge their ideas." **JM**

"You want to move people and excite people and even challenge their ideas."

See www.timbowness.co.uk for more information, music, videos and upcoming live dates.

INTRO extras

STEVE HACKETT'S CLASSICAL ALBUMS SET FOR REISSUE

Steve Hackett's classical guitar albums are set for a series of reissues, kicking off with 1983's *Bay Of Kings* and 1988's *Momentum*, which are released on August 24 via InsideOutMusic. Both have been newly remastered for vinyl and will be available as gatefold 180g LPs in both black and limited coloured vinyl editions. New Digipak CD editions will also be also available. See hackettsongs.com for more.

Across the sky: Jordan Rudess is back.

PRESS/ JERRY LOFARO

JORDAN RUDESS SOARS ON LATEST

Permission To Fly delves into existence with a variety of special guest musicians.

Never one to take things easy when there's the business of making music to be taken care of, Dream Theater keyboardist Jordan Rudess is set to return when his new solo album, *Permission To Fly*, is released via InsideOutMusic on September 6.

According to Rudess, it promises to "push creative, sonic and technological boundaries" as it delves "into the complexities of human existence within our multifaceted world."

He adds, "*Permission To Fly* is a diverse collection – ranging from elaborate prog compositions to sweeping ballads. The songs explore diverse themes from everyday human struggles to supernatural phenomena."

Joining Rudess are variety of guest musicians that include drummer Darby Todd, That Joe Payne on vocals, electric and classical guitarist Stephen Dadaian, and six-string sensation Bastian Martinez providing guest guitar solos. Writing on Instagram, Martinez was effusive in his praise of Rudess saying, "I am very happy to have been able to fulfil a dream, thank you Jordan for being an incredible musician but above all an amazing person! Today, a dream came true for me!"

For his part, Rudess described the experience as "unleashing a wave of creativity."

Permission To Fly will be available as limited CD Digipak, a 180g double vinyl gatefold LP as well as a digital album. Head on over to www.jordanrudess.com for more information. **JM**

JOHN HOLDEN REVEALS THE CONCEPTS OF NEW ALBUM

Historical themes lay at the heart of *Proximity & Chance*.

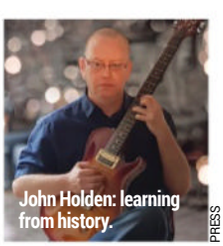
British prog songwriter John Holden has explained how the themes of his fifth album, *Proximity & Chance* have been drawn from real historical stories and the result of "falling down rabbit holes" in pursuit of intriguing tales.

Burnt Cork And Limelight relates the story of Victorian actor William Terris from the point of view of his assassin, a disgruntled former protégé, while *Agents* is based on the 2018 Salisbury poisonings. "Putin was just pushing the West – I'm fascinated by the concept of megalomania," says Holden.

The track, *Proximity* ponders the chance occurrences that created our universe while opening track *13* is inspired by The Thirteen Club, a 19th-century society set up to debunk superstitions around the number.

"I'm not remotely superstitious, but we still use these ideas every day – touch wood, fingers crossed, etc.," Holden explains.

Proximity & Chance is available to purchase now through www.johnholdenmusic.com. **JS**



John Holden: learning from history.

PRESS

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LESOIR BROADEN THEIR HORIZONS

Upcoming album, *Push Back The Horizon* tipped to reach a whole new audience.

Somebody likes you: Lesoir are gearing up for a busy year.

PRESS/HARRY HEUTS

Maastricht-based Lesoir return with a campaign of single releases to promote their sixth studio album, *Push Back The Horizon*, which is out in the autumn. Alongside this the band will be playing some carefully selected gigs including a few double-headline European dates with British proggers Pure Reason Revolution.

After a deliberate break in live work for most of 2023, the band recorded the album in their hometown utilising the production skills of long-time collaborator and Muse producer John Cornfield, with vocals specifically produced by Paul Reeve, known for his similar role with Matt Bellamy. They then set about looking for a label that would share their belief in the material and enable them to widen their audience base. They settled on V2 Records, best known for their varied roster including Skunk Anansie, Mumford And Sons and Moby, and are now embarking on a very carefully planned promotional campaign.

"We decided with the record label that there should be four singles released before the album comes out," explains singer/flutist/pianist Maartje Meessen, "but we said to them that they should be leading in this, and should choose the tracks. It was difficult giving that choice away, but it was important to us, because we're aware that the music industry changes and although we want to keep our prog audience, we also want to reach out and the label would be best placed to know how we might do that."

"The singles that the record label chose aren't particularly what we would have chosen," adds guitarist and main writer, Ingo Dassen, "but we've been playing a couple of them live and they've really grown on me. In fact, we'll be playing some new tracks live and testing them out [this year]."

On the live front, the band are looking forward to getting out and playing again, especially with the recently announced shows with Pure Reason Revolution.

"We will be playing some truly lovely venues in Europe and we hope that there might be a couple of UK dates as well, where Pure Reason Revolution are obviously a bigger band than us, but we feel it's a really good fit," says Dassen with no little enthusiasm.

Push Back The Horizon is out on September 20. A special vinyl version will also include the band's epic 20-minute track *Babel*, originally recorded and released in 2022. **GMM**

> **"We've been playing the new tracks live and they've really grown on me."**

See www.lesoirmusic.com for more information and updates.

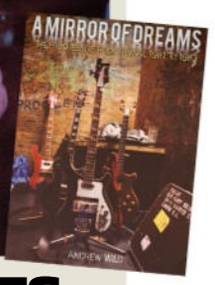
INTRO extras

KEYS RETURN WITH SECOND ALBUM

Mark Mangold's all-keyboard project KEYS are set to return on July 19 with the release of their second album, *The Grand Seduction* via Escape Music. Vinyl copies of the record will be pressed on 180g yellow vinyl and are limited to just 200 individually numbered editions. However, fans of digital formats and CDs will also be catered for. See www.facebook.com/Keysband

They know you know: Marillion lead the 80s prog charge.

PETE STILL/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES



NEW BOOK CHARTS 80S PROG REVIVAL

The first of a two-volume history explores the rise of Marillion, Pendragon and more.

A new book detailing the rise of the prog rock revival of the 1980s traces the inspiration behind the scene to the influence of Genesis' second live album. Andrew Wild, the author of *A Mirror Of Dreams – The Progressive Rock Revival 1981 To 1983*, which is out via Kingmaker Publishing on June 21, says, "What was really important about the 80s revival was that it wasn't 30-year-old guys trying to relive their 20-year-old self, it was 20-year-old guys who were new to all of this. Almost all of the players of that period said, 'My older sibling had a copy of *Seconds Out* in their album collection.' It seems to be a theme almost all the way through."

The book charts the intertwining stories of the six bands which led the progressive rock revival: Marillion, IQ, Pallas, Pendragon, Solstice and Twelfth Night.

"What I didn't want to do was six separate biographies," Wild says, "I wanted one biography of six bands. "It's almost a day-by-day, blow-by-blow account of what those six bands were up to. So, one band might have been playing a gig in Scotland while another was playing the same night in Southampton but it was all part of the same story. The culmination is the Reading Festival in 1983, where five of those six bands performed, and IQ who didn't perform were there as fans."

A second volume, due for publication in 2025, will cover the years 1984 to 1989.

See www.burningshed.com/store/kingmaker for more. **JM**

AND SO I WATCH YOU FROM AFAR PAY HOMAGE TO HOME

Belfast band go back to basics on this summer's *Megafauna*.

After 2022's acclaimed epic, *Jettison*, Belfast post-rock quartet And So I Watch You From Afar have returned to "home comforts" for an album that pays homage to Northern Ireland and the band's deep-rooted support network. As such, the band have benefitted from a back-to-basics approach with *Megafauna*, which releases via Pelagic Records, on August 9.

"It was lovely to just get in the back into the room with two guitars, bass and drums: home comforts," explains guitarist Rory Friers. "There was a lot of great collaboration and going off-road, exploring new ideas together, so the songs are very frenetic, high energy and choppy, but in essence it's a very simple and honest record. We love it."

The band will tour in December playing at Manchester's Albert Hall (13), Bristol's The Marble Factory (14), London's Brixton Electric (15), Birmingham's O2 Institute (16), Glasgow's St Luke's (17) and Nottingham's Rescue Rooms (18).

Head to www.asiwyfa.com for more info. **POW**

Tip of the hat: ASIWYFA

PRESS/TOM MCGEEHAN

FAD GADGETS

Rhodri Marsden on three of the latest must-have gizmos currently putting the prog in progress.

ASTELL & KERN NOVUS

This month, a small selection of things that neither you nor I can afford, but there's nothing wrong with a bit of aspirational ogling. Astell & Kern are known primarily for their eye-wateringly expensive digital music players, but here they've collaborated with Empire Ears, known for eye-wateringly expensive in-ear monitors beloved by a fairly small number of wealthy musicians. These earphones have a 24-carat gold-plated faceplate, bespoke balanced armatures, dual high mass bone conductors and are described by the firm as an "audacious leap forward". At £4,999 the pair, you'd have to agree.

www.astellnkern.com

BB KING'S GIBSON

During a 1997 concert at the Vatican, BB King presented one of his "Lucille" guitars, a 1996 Gibson in traditional black, to Pope John Paul II. "For me it was a very emotional experience," said King afterwards. Anyway, it clearly meant a lot to the Pope, too, because shortly afterwards the Vatican Gendarmerie raffled it for charity. Now, 20 years on, the son of the superintendent who won it is selling it off. The auction blurb states: "From the moment it was received, the guitar has never been used." You don't say. It's estimated to fetch around £60,000.

www.bit.ly/bbpope

MAGICO M7

Every audio purchase I make involves a trade-off between quality and price, because I live in the real world. But for those that don't, here are the Magico M7 loudspeakers, each of which weighs close to a quarter of a tonne and fashioned from a monocoque carbon fibre shell. It's the loudspeaker equivalent of a Formula 1 car, a tour de force of electronic engineering. The price tag for a pair of them would be £450,000, but ideally you'd run them through a pair of Relentless Epic 800 mono power amplifiers (£236,000 each) so let's just call it a million quid. Cash preferred.

www.magicoaudio.com

MY PROG HERO

Inspiring the wider music world...

Thinking about you: P.O.D.'s Marcos Curiel (inset) can't get Radiohead out of his mind.

GIE KNAEPS/GETTY IMAGES

PRESS/ALICIA HAUFF

MARCOS CURIEL

Anyone can play guitar but no one makes it sound quite the way **Radiohead** do, says the P.O.D. shredder and long-term fan.

"I used to work in a retail store called *Hot Topic* that sold goth apparel and we got to choose what CDs got played. *OK Computer* was always in the mix. There were people who'd be like, 'This again?' and I'd tell them that it made my shift easier.

The thing about Radiohead is that they can go from the very complex and dark to the very soulful and beautiful. They just make things flow and as an artist, a musician, and also as a listener, I really appreciate that. I'd heard *Creep* and the earlier stuff, but *OK Computer* was critically acclaimed and commercially accepted, and that was kind of like the entry level for me; I could explore it as a youngster and as I developed as a musician. And throughout the years as they progressed and became more progressive, I fell deeper in love with what they did.

I loved the move to *Kid A*. When they got into that more electronic stuff, I thought that was amazing. There were a lot of people who didn't like that transition but I loved it. A lot of friends who were into Radiohead didn't know how to feel about it at the time but they all love it now. I saw them at the Embarcadero in San Diego and I saw them at the Sleep Train Amphitheater, where I had seats right by the soundboard, which was level to the stage so I could experience it at full volume. I appreciate everything they do creatively and melodically and they're one of those bands that I can't stop listening to.

It's hard to chose a favourite album. *The Bends* is up there for me, *In Rainbows* and *Hail To The Thief* aren't their most successful albums but they have things on there that I love. The bass line in *Myxomatosis*, I just love that kind of stuff. It depends on the kind of mood that I'm in. If I want more poppy Radiohead then I'll go for *OK Computer* and I love *A Moon Shaped Pool*, right now, I'm waiting for new material. But *Kid A* is up there too, and one of my favourite songs is *Knives Out*. I like them all. I also love Thom Yorke's solo stuff. I'm still trying to warm up to The Smile but my heart is with Radiohead." **JM**

"Radiohead are one of those bands that I can't stop listening to."

P.O.D.'s 11th album, Veritas, is out now via Mascot Records. For more info, see www.payableondeath.com.

PROG IN BRIEF

PRESS/WILLIAMLACALMONTIE

Alison Cotton (right) presents a multimedia production of her album *Engelchen* at The Bedford in London on June 22. She then goes on tour in July calling at London (6), Barrow-in-Furness (9), Hebden Bridge (12), Fano Folk Festival in Denmark (27) and Colchester (29). See www.linktr.ee/alison_cotton.

Spooky proggers **The Witching Tale** will bring the magic on a nine-date tour. They play London (June 30), Hastings (August 5), Reading (6), Brighton (7), Shapwick (8), Plymouth (9), Frome (10), Birmingham (11) and Swindon (October 27). Full details are at www.linktr.ee/thewitchingtale.

Steeleye Span's sixth studio album *Now We Are Six* gets the 50th-anniversary treatment when it's released on vinyl and CD via Chrysalis Records on July 12. The remastered album includes rare BBC sessions and testimonials from the bandmembers. See www.steeleyespan.org.uk for more.

HAWKWIND
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- Deluxe 3 disc limited edition boxed set of the classic 1971 album by Hawkwind.
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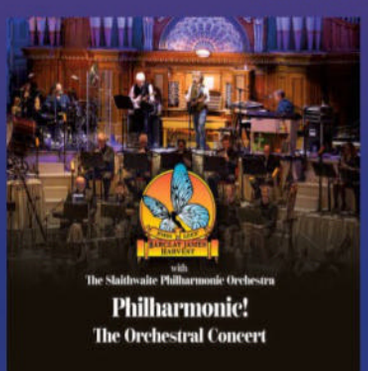
- With a stunning new stereo & 5.1 surround sound remix by Stephen W Tayler from the original multi-track master tapes with new mixes of session out-takes plus the single version of 'Silver Machine' and 'Seven By Seven'.
- Also available as remastered gatefold vinyl
- Release date 30th August 2024

JACK BRUCE
'SONGS FOR A TAILOR'
(REMASTERED 2CD/2 BLU-RAY EXPANDED EDITION)

ALSO AVAILABLE IN VINYL

- Deluxe 2CD / 2 multi-region Blu ray disc deluxe boxed set edition of the classic album by Jack Bruce.
- Newly remastered and mixed from the original master tapes.
- Featuring an additional 32 bonus tracks drawn from Stephen W Tayler's new 5.1 surround sound & stereo mixes of the album and a video Blu ray of the 1970 documentary film Rope Ladder To The Moon.
- Also available as remastered gatefold vinyl edition
- Release date 26th July 2024

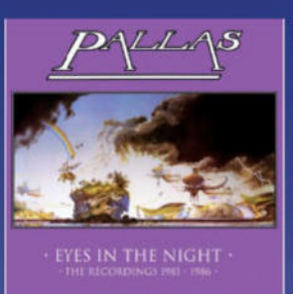
JOHN LEES' BARCLAY JAMES HARVEST
'PHILHARMONIC! THE ORCHESTRAL CONCERT'
(2CD, BLU-RAY AND DVD EDITION)



- Clamshell box set of the orchestral concert by John Lees' Barclay James Harvest with The Slaithwaite Philharmonic Orchestra on 23rd September 2023.
- Featuring 2 CDs and 1 Blu-ray HD video disc (region free) & 1 DVD video (ntsc /region free).
- Includes an illustrated booklet.
- Release date 26th July 2024

AL STEWART
'PAST, PRESENT & FUTURE' 50TH ANNIVERSARY
(3CD/BLU-RAY LIMITED EDITION BOX SET)

- Deluxe 3CD / multi-region Blu-ray disc 50th anniversary limited edition boxed set of the classic 1973 album by Al Stewart.
- Newly remastered and mixed from the original master tapes. Featuring an additional 30 bonus tracks drawn from Stephen W Tayler's new surround sound and stereo mixes of the album & a new mix of a concert recorded at the Howff in London in 1974.
- Release Date 28th June 2024

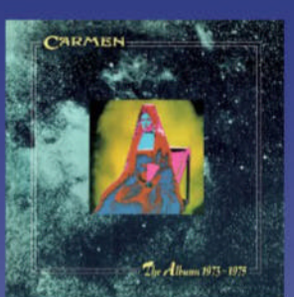


PALLAS
'EYES IN THE NIGHT - THE RECORDINGS 1981 - 1986'
(6CD/BLU-RAY REMASTERED BOX SET)

- New official 4CD remastered clamshell box set featuring all of the surviving sessions by Pallas.
- A new 7 disc boxed set anthology with 6 CDs and 1 blu-ray video celebrating the music of neo prog band Pallas 1981 – 1986. Featuring the albums Arrive Alive, The Sentinel, The Wedge, singles and the 'Knightmoves' EP along with BBC recordings of the band's Reading Festival appearance in 1983 and a session for the Friday Rock Show in March 1984 and a CD of a previously unissued concert recorded at Ritzy's, Aberdeen in October 1985, as well as a blu-ray video disc (region free).
- Release Date 28th June 2024

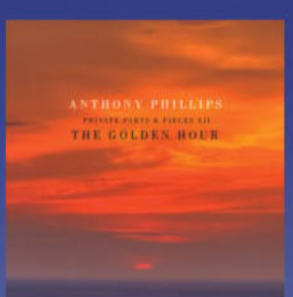
EDGAR BROUGHTON BAND
'GONE BLUE - THE BBC SESSIONS'
(4CD BOX SET)

- New official 4CD remastered clamshell box set featuring all of the surviving sessions by the Edgar Broughton Band recorded for the BBC between 1969 and 1973.
- Featuring 32 previously unreleased tracks. All tracks newly remastered from the BBC masters. Includes an illustrated booklet with essay.
- Release Date 31st May 2024



CARMEN
'THE ALBUMS 1973-1975'
(3CD BOXSET)

- New 3CD clamshell box set featuring all the albums recorded by the unique progressive rock band Carmen between 1973 and 1975.
- Featuring the albums 'Fandangos In Space', 'Dancing on a Cold Wind' and 'The Gypsies'. With an illustrated booklet featuring a new essay.
- Release Date 31st May 2024



ANTHONY PHILLIPS
'THE GOLDEN HOUR - PRIVATE PARTS AND PIECES XII'
(CD)

- The wonderful new volume in the 'Private Parts and Pieces' series by composer and Genesis founder member Anthony Phillips.
- Release Date 31st May 2024

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PRESS/ DARYA MARGOLINA

Alber Jupiter: looking on the sunny side.

ALBER JUPITER

Neu!-inspired duo roll out the pedals for their cosmic instrumentals.

FRENCH DUO ALBER Jupiter hail from Rennes in northwest France, which is an area best known for its medieval half-timbered houses and neoclassical cathedral. The pair grew up listening to Pink Floyd and Led Zeppelin, although the real epiphany came when, as teenagers, they accidentally caught the Chilean space rockers Föllakzoid at a festival in Switzerland, a moment they describe as "like a slap in the face".

"We said to ourselves, 'That's what we have to do — we need to put together a band like Föllakzoid!'" recalls bass player Nicolas Terroitin. "We wanted to plagiarise their music, but what came out was something more personal."

Föllakzoid's immersive soundscapes were joined by a burgeoning love of everything kosmische.

"When I was 20, I met musicians who played krautrock," he adds. "It was psychedelic! Hypnotic! With groove! Elements that I loved in music in general, and which in krautrock were brought together in a way that was new to me."

Drummer Jonathan Sonney had more exposure to these motorik sounds from an earlier age.

"I discovered krautrock very early because my mother has a great record collection. I'd often hear Brian Eno, Klaus Schulze and Tangerine Dream. I wasn't interested in it right away, but now I'd say our main influences are Neu!, Föllakzoid, Sigur Rós, Godspeed You! Black Emperor and Pink Floyd."

Terroitin adds, "To begin with, we had more of a psychedelic vision than a cosmic one. The cosmic side came next, when we found the name Alber Jupiter, slightly by chance but mainly because we thought it sounded good."

The duo do indeed make a pulsating, exciting and cosmic sound, a fact that didn't go unnoticed by the local festival Trans Musicales, which has been running every December since 1979 and has put on artists including Nirvana, Daft Punk and the Beastie Boys. As well as a four-night residency there, Alber Jupiter have also recorded two albums: 2019's *We Are Just Floating In Space* and this year's *Puis Vient La Nuit* ('Then comes the night'). One wonders how they manage to make such an awesome racket with just a drum kit and a bass guitar?

"Effects," explains Terroitin. "Especially delays, which multiply each note. Throw in a looper with two amps in stereo to thicken the sound. It helps to give the illusion of a bigger group."

The artwork for *Puis Vient La Nuit* features one solitary tree being reigned over by a terrifying black fireball while the press release talks of the "death of our sun" two billion years from now. However, it's not a concept record.

Says Terroitin: "We became a bit delirious after reading the book *Last And First Men* by [sci-fi writer] Olaf Stapledon, which tells of the end of humanity when the sun is about to die, and the hope for it to be reborn from its ashes. We were just trying to give coherence to the story to the album, but it's not really a conceptual thing; we composed the pieces without worrying about that business.

"To be clear," he says, with a laugh, "the death of the sun doesn't scare us." **JA**

PROG FILE

LINE-UP
Nicolas Terroitin *(bass)*, **Jonathan Sonney** *(drums)*

SOUNDS LIKE
Neu! but in outer space

CURRENT RELEASE
Puis Vient La Nuit is out now via Up In Her Room

WEBSITE
alberjupiter.bandcamp.com

"Krautrock brought together elements that I loved in music in a way that was new to me."

COCTEAU TWINS

TREASURE

(4AD, 1984)

Back in the mid-80s when levity and piss-taking were an integral part of the music press, British weekly music mag *NME* ran a humourous column called 'Bismillah' in its jokey Thrills pages. Dedicated to highlighting excruciatingly bad lyrics – who can forget The Cult's '*Sittin' on a mountain, looking at the sun/Plastic fantastic lobster telephone*' from *Aphrodisiac Jacket* among many other dubious pearls? – it probably did more to seal the image of Cocteau Twins singing in gibberish than anything else when it ran the lyrics of *Ivo*, the opening song of *Treasure*, as '*Ping pong page scrub pandor pompadour/Henry he's sweet he saved me.*' (They are, in actual fact, '*Peep hole, peach blow, Pandora, pompadour/Pale leaf, pink sweet, Persephone.*')

Of course, Cocteau Twins – and more specifically singer Elizabeth Fraser – were much smarter than that. Partly masking her own shyness, her lyrical obfuscation worked better when looked at as a form of instrumentation that blended with the ethereal contributions of guitarist and co-founder Robin Guthrie and the newly-joined bassist Simon Raymonde, who would later find even greater success as the founder of the Bella Union record label.

Their third studio album, 1984's *Treasure*, is the point where Cocteau Twins' musical vision and ambitions coalesced to create a world that was wholly their own. While their previous two albums – *Garlands* (1982) and *Head Over Heels* (1983) – and a steady series of EPs that displayed their evolving maturity had won them the support of John Peel's late-night listeners and the more cerebral wing of what was later to be defined as 'goth', *Treasure* found the trio unshackling the ties of inspiration to set sail into an ocean of creativity that defied the narrow strictures of easy categorisation.

Restraint was something that other bands did. In the studio, Cocteau Twins luxuriated in the soundscapes of reverb and the widescreen effects of delay pedals and echoes. Embracing the emerging digital technology of the age, their walls and sheets of sound would shine the light for the legions of bands that would follow in their wake in the years to come. It would be called shoegaze in the UK, the Americans would dub it dream pop, while really, with little precedent before them, Cocteau Twins were a progressive band to their very core.

Witness the chimes of *Lorelei* that evoke the frosts of winter or the sang-froid that drives the chilly yet charming *Aloysius*. And while the musical backdrop of Guthrie and Raymonde pushes forward, Fraser's vocal whoops and undulations, seemingly couched in childlike splendour, elevate Cocteau Twins to the height of the true originals. The Victorian-sounding names for songtitles (see *Beatrix* and *Cicely*) left them open to detractors, but like all true pioneers, their hats were always going to be filled with arrows.

JULIAN MARSZALEK

ALL AROUND THE WORLD

Our far-out trip to far-flung prog

PRESS/TOMASZ KONIECZNY

You can't keep a good band down: Oudeziel rise like a phoenix.

OUDEZIEL

Blowing up a storm, the Polish proggers bind a number of different threads to create an expansive experience.

"Our music is a bit like the weather," considers Artur Wolski, the guitarist and keyboard player of Polish proggy art-rockers Oudeziel. "There are songs that start on a lazy morning, when the fog evaporates and the sun rises. There are elements of a summer storm that comes suddenly. We live close to the Baltic Sea and such a comparison reflects well on the progression in the music."

Wolski's assessment is indeed apt. Oudeziel was formed by the guitarist and drummer Jarek Bielawski from the ashes of the ethereal trio Obrasqi, who came to premature close at the end of 2022 following untimely passing of singer Monika Dejk-Wikła.

"We decided to end that band's activity and to create music by inviting guest musicians and being without a permanent singer," explains Wolski. Bassist Mateusz Bakowski joins them for live work.

Oudeziel's first recordings emerged halfway through 2023, and their eponymous EP has been released on CD and via streaming services. Blending post-rock with prog and ambient textures, they've also been taken under the wing of celebrated Polish proggers Riverside, whom they've opened for on tour. The experience has proved beneficial.

"Working with such a professional team has prepared us for the possibility of playing on larger stages," says Wolski. "And it helped us as performers on our recent tour."

Of creating their music in the studio and fine-tuning the material on the road, Wolski says, "Only when the songs are ready and recorded do they become the basis for playing live."

He continues, "There's a lot of improvisation in our music, which is why the live songs are different from recordings. We also assign an important role to the sound engineer by arranging everything with him so that we can convey what we want to achieve in a live setting."

Wolski concludes by stressing that Oudeziel are an active rather than passive experience.

"Our music requires attention to create time for reflection and listening to oneself." **JM**

"Our music requires attention to create time for reflection."

For more information see oudeziel.bandcamp.com.

PROG IN BRIEF

Dutch prog pioneers **Focus** (right) have announced the release of a new single. Taken from their forthcoming album *Focus 12*, the punningly titled *Fjord Focus* is out on July 5 and will be available across all major platforms and streaming services. For more info, see www.focustheband.co.uk.

Mediæval Bæbes celebrate the summer solstice by releasing new compilation album *Realm Of The Fae* on June 21 via Queen Of Sheeba Records. They've also announced their biggest tour to date by playing 17 shows across the UK in December. Full details at www.mediaevalbaebes.com.

TEIGER

Meet the atmospheric London trio who refuse to be pigeonholed.

IT'S HARD TO believe Talie Rose Eigeland had barely played guitar or sung before launching Teiger around two years ago, given the depth and conviction of their self-titled debut album.

"It's happened very fast in the grand scheme of things," she admits.

Very fast indeed. The London-based trio have quickly developed a strong reputation as ones to watch, with their dark, ethereal undertones standing out in an industry often jam-packed with cookie-cutter acts. Completed by drummer Jon Steele and bassist Phillip Eldridge-Smith, Teiger have copped comparisons to everyone from Jefferson Airplane to Tool — while Eigeland herself has highlighted Opeth, Radiohead and PJ Harvey as influences. Be ready to chuck those comparisons out the window, though; the trio are already carving their own path, indie-flecked but adventurous and otherworldly, which is underpinned by organic songwriting where whatever comes out, comes out.

"We're not the next X [insert random genre]," Eigeland explains. "We can't really be categorised. We're more of a percussive band than a melody band, I think. Even though the lyrics come first, it's very much soundscaping and atmosphere above melody. There's no verse/chorus, or very little verse/chorus. We don't really think that way."

The roots of the band, meanwhile, stem from Eigeland and Steele knowing each other from blues jams.

"I always admired his drumming and we sort of became friends, and then he heard a couple of my very early demos," Eigeland explains. "He offered his drum services, which made me think, 'Oh, there's something here.' And then we recruited the bass player and it all started happening very quickly.

"Our influences are all very, very different and I think they come out indirectly: in colours and moods, not so much in the way we actually play or write the music."

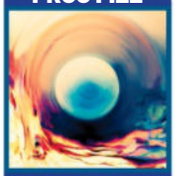
One key element of the band's distinctive, stripped-back sound is Eigeland's electric acoustic guitar — her "baby" — which has led to the band landing unusual descriptions such as "quiet metal".

"I am a one-guitar pony," she says with a laugh. "It's an unusual blend — you have the physicality of an acoustic but you can bend the string like an electric. And we use it in quite a percussive way, which works really well with the rhythm section."

With Teiger's self-titled debut album only landing last year and a limited-edition vinyl due on September 8, the trio appear to be forward-thinking — the follow-up is already written and the third is in the works, too. Their second album will see the band investigate their prog flourishes further, with darker and heavier moods. Eigeland knows this will push the group further away from their commercial appeal — but if that's the way it is, then so be it.

"The goal is never to write something inaccessible," Eigeland says. "I'm not a good enough musician to decide, 'I'm going to write this sort of style.' But it's nice to explore a much more complicated form of writing, which is where my home is musically. But the sound will stay very Teiger." **CC**

PROG FILE



LINE-UP

Talie Rose Eigeland *(vocals, guitar)*, **Jon Steele** *(drums)*, **Phillip Eldridge-Smith** *(bass)*

SOUNDS LIKE

Atmospheric musings fit for the 1970s as much as the 2020s

CURRENT RELEASE

Teiger is out now via Bandcamp

WEBSITE

teiger.land

PROG PRESENTS NEW MUSIC
Listen to TEIGER all this month on PROGZILLA RADIO
progzilla.com/listen/

"It's very much soundscaping and atmosphere above melody."

Que sera sera: Whatever will be, will be for Teiger.

PRESS/TOM ROWLAND

Official Progressive Albums Chart

The prog top 30 albums

May 2024

Compiled by Official Charts Company

1 **PETER GABRIEL** i/o *(REAL WORLD RECORDS)*
2 **PINK FLOYD** Animals *(PINK FLOYD RECORDS/RHINO)*
3 **HAWKWIND** Stories From Time And Space *(CHERRY RED)*
4 **AYREON** 01011001 – Live Beneath The Waves *(MUSIC THEORIES)*
5 **JANE WEAVER** Love In Constant Spectacle *(FIRE)*
6 **TAME IMPALA** Lonerism *(FICTION)*
7 **PALLBEARER** Mind Burns Alive *(NUCLEAR BLAST)*
8 **ROGER WATERS** The Dark Side Of The Moon Redux *(COOKING VINYL)*
9 **MIKE OLDFIELD** Tubular Bells – 50th Anniversary Edition *(UMC)*
10 **BILL NELSON** Powertron *(SONODELUXE)*
11 **WITHIN TEMPTATION** Bleed Out *(FORCE MUSIC)*
12 **ANETTE OLZON** Rapture *(FRONTIERS)*
13 **TANGENT** To Follow Polaris *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
14 **STEVEN WILSON** The Harmony Codex *(VIRGIN/SW RECORDS)*
15 **EMERSON LAKE & POWELL** The Complete Collection *(SPIRIT OF UNICORN MUSIC)*
16 **STEVE HACKETT** The Circus And The Nightwhale *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
17 **JETHRO TULL** RökFlöte *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
18 **PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING** Inform Educate Entertain *(TEST CARD RECORDINGS)*
19 **PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING** This New Noise *(TEST CARD RECORDINGS)*
20 **BIG BIG TRAIN** The Likes Of Us *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
21 **GOAT** The Gallows Pole OST *(ROCKET RECORDINGS)*
22 **KING GIZZARD & LIZARD WIZARD** PetroDragonic Apocalypse *(KGLW)*
23 **GENTLE GIANT** The Missing Piece *(CHRYSALIS)*
24 **BRIAN ENO** Eno OST *(UNIVERSAL)*
25 **OLIVER WAKEMAN** Anam Cara *(SPIRIT OF UNICORN MUSIC)*
26 **POLYPHIA** Live At The Factory In Deep Ellum *(RISE)*
27 **SIGUR RÓS** Átta *(BMG)*
28 **PORCUPINE TREE** Deadwing *(TRANSMISSION)*
29 **CAMEL** Mirage *(UMC)*
30 **TESSERACT** War Of Being *(KSCOPE)*

FIND OUT MORE AT **WWW.OFFICIALCHARTS.COM**

WIN! YES *TALK* BUNDLE

This issue, we're commemorating the 30th anniversary of Yes's "forgotten album" with a special bundle set. Originally released in 1994, *Talk* has been out of print for many years, but has now been fully remastered and reissued by Spirit Of Unicorn Music. And we have a copy of the four-CD deluxe and white double vinyl reissues to give away to one lucky reader.

The expanded CD set includes two discs with live recordings from the band's June 1994 show in Canandigua, New York, as well as a third with bonus demo and instrumental tracks. There are liner notes from *Prog* Editor Jerry Ewing, too, which contain new interviews with Trevor Rabin and Jon Anderson. The very limited-edition and extremely rare vinyl edition also features a special version of *The Calling* and it's all packaged in a gatefold sleeve.

To be in with a chance of winning this special prize, visit www.bit.ly/PROG_151 and answer the following question:

***Talk* shares a line-up with another Yes album, but which one is it?**

a) ***90125***
b) ***Big Generator***
c) ***Keys To Ascension***

TERMS AND CONDITIONS: This competition will be open from June 21-August 2, 2024. By entering you agree to our competition rules (available at www.futureplc.com/competition-rules). Entries limited to one per household regardless of the form of entry. Use of automated devices as methods of submission are not valid forms of entry. The winner will be selected at random from all correct entries received by the closing date. No employees of Future Publishing or any of its group companies or the employees of any entity which has been involved with the administration of this competition or any member of their households may enter this competition. All prize details are correct at time of press, *Prog* magazine reserves the right to offer an alternative, if necessary. The winner will be notified by Future by email after the closing date. If a winner has not responded after 28 days, an alternative winner will be drawn.

Now our turn...

The Editor
Jerry Ewing

LEPROUS
Melodies Of Atonement
INSIDEOUTMUSIC

The Art Guy
Russell Fairbrother

GARLANDS
Turn The Sky
LA POCHETTE SURPRISE RECORDS

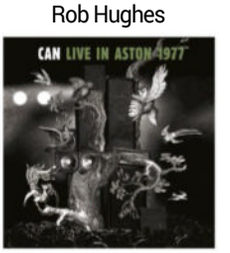
The Deputy Ed
Natasha Scharf

MONO
Oath
PELAGIC

The Musician
John Holden

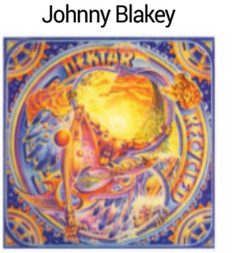
THE BARDIC DEPTHS
What We Really Like In Stories
THEBARDICDEPTHS.BANDCAMP.COM

The Writer
Rob Hughes



CAN
Live In Aston 1977
MUTE/FUTURE DAYS

The Reader
Johnny Blakey



NEKTAR
Recycled
DECCA

LAST PLANE OUT

Swedish pop singer and music journalist join forces for a progtastic project.

IN 1996, WHEN Nils Erikson released his Swedish Grammy-nominated debut *Spår*, the music journalist, musician and lyricist Anders Lundquist took a fateful call from Sony Records.

"The guy said, 'You like Peter Gabriel, right?' I said, 'Well, my son's name is Gabriel — that's a clue!'" Erikson recalls.

Lundquist was soon hired to write the bio for Erikson's debut, and so began a beautiful friendship.

"I couldn't believe there was a Swedish artist up there with Bowie, Gabriel, David Sylvian and all those guys", says Lundquist today, when he and Erikson join *Prog* via Zoom. "Nils should be a household name by now."

Happily, proper recognition may now beckon. Last Plane Out's self-titled debut is an elegant, thought-provoking pop-prog record, which sees Erikson — more recently of Swedish proggers Karmakanic — handle vocals and write the music, and Lundquist — formerly of heavy prog band Future Elephants? (sic) - write the words.

"When Anders gives me a lyric it's like having a shortcut to my own heart", says Erikson, and that much is clear listening to Last Plane Out's single, *Making Her Smile*. A wistful gem part inspired by the duo's experiences of going through divorces as younger men, it features Jonas Reingold of Karmakanic and Steve Hackett's band on lead guitar and bass, but Erikson plays everything else on the album.

Asked about their debut's lengthy gestation, Erikson says it was a question of "gathering the right songs over time". He worked on the music at his converted stable-cum-home studio, while Lundquist, travelling the world interviewing other musicians, penned lyrics in Paris, New York, and on a bench in London's Hyde Park. The duo's name, meanwhile, echoes the title of US prog band Toy Matinee's biggest song, and the album is dedicated to Toy Matinee's late frontman, Kevin Gilbert.

"I actually met him in Tokyo," says Erikson of Gilbert, who died in 1996 aged just 29. "Both of the bands we were in were part of this international competition. I had appendicitis, and while the other acts were feasting and go-karting with the [judging panel], me and Kevin just hung out on the tourbus. We really connected."

Elsewhere on the album, *Tales Of A Flower Maiden* taps dark Swedish folk and classical influences, and *Nobody Else, No* — a duet with Swedish-Iranian singer Aida Jabbari — joins the dots between A-ha and Tears For Fears. Last Plane Out's music has already drawn praise from ABBA's Benny Andersson, no less, as well as Hasse Fröberg of Swedish proggers The Flower Kings.

The album's brilliant closer, *Leave A Light On*, is dedicated to late sisters Josefin Nilsson and Marie Nilsson-Lind of Swedish band Ainbusk, who, with Erikson and Lundquist's full approval, had previously recorded their own completely different version of the song.

"Josefin passed in 2016, and Marie passed in January 2024, just a week after she'd given us her blessing to release our version", says Lundquist.

"I had given them the music and Marie was kind enough to give it back", adds Erikson. "We thought it a nice gesture to dedicate *Leave A Light On* to them." **JMN**

PROG FILE

LINE-UP

Nils Erikson *(vocals, keyboards, programming etc.),* **Anders Lundquist** *(lyrics)*

SOUNDS LIKE

Eloquent and classy pop-prog with shades of David Bowie, ELO, Peter Gabriel and more

CURRENT RELEASE

Last Plane Out is now via streaming platforms

WEBSITE

www.facebook.com/last.plane.outSE

PROG PRESENTS NEW MUSIC
Listen to LAST PLANE OUT all this month on PROGZILLA RADIO
progzilla.com/listen/

"Nils is up there with Bowie, Gabriel, David Sylvian. He should be a household name by now."

Last Plane Out are flying high.

PRESS/JOHAN BERGMARK

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CANDACRAIG

Former thespians finally find their voice as neo-prog folk duo.

MUSIC HAS ALWAYS been a thread running through the lives of Candacraig's Sharon Cannings and Martin Nicholls. Prior to entering the music industry however, both had careers as actors and first met while performing in a local Shakespeare production.

"It was one or the other really for me," Cannings begins. "Music has always followed us around. It was something we enjoyed but never thought we'd end up doing as a career."

Having fallen out of love with acting, the pair turned to the world of music, becoming a professional duo in 2015. In 2019, they decided to give Candacraig a shot, having had much of the music for almost two decades.

"We never intended to do progressive rock," Nicholls admits. "We just ended up writing the music that we liked."

It was through performing at festivals that they discovered a thriving prog scene.

"We've always been prog fans but when we started out, we thought we were folk," Cannings recalls. "It became apparent in our later writings that we weren't. Prog is a broad genre and that's what we love about it."

The duo first bonded over a mutual love of Pink Floyd. Their shared music tastes also include the Laurel Canyon music of the late 60s, including Joni Mitchell, Crosby, Stills & Nash, and, initially, these were the sounds they tried to emulate.

As the youngest in their families, Nicholls and Cannings were introduced to a variety of music from a young age. Both also learnt to play instruments — Nicholls the cello and Cannings the piano.

Candacraig's music is a rich amalgamation of the sounds that have shaped the duo's lives. Their debut album, *Thunder With Whispers*, and latest release, *Lit By Lightning*, blend folk, classic and prog rock, drawing listeners into dark, compelling worlds.

For Nicholls and Cannings, the completion of *Lit By Lightning* was a great achievement after much hard work behind the scenes. They admit, however, that the music lacks some finesse.

"We struggled to get everyone together due to Covid," Nicholls explains. "We didn't want tracks recorded remotely. We wanted a live band sound."

However, that's been an evolving process that they're only just working out.

"It used to be that Martin would pick up an acoustic guitar and I'd sing along to some lyrics," says Cannings. "On piano, I'd lock myself away and wouldn't show Martin until it was formed. Now we're learning to collaborate."

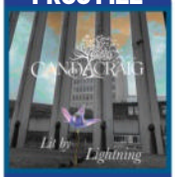
A new body of work is already on the horizon, this time a concept album based on a piece of theatre written by Cannings titled *Jack Frost's Wedding Day*. The duo plan on taking their time with this one, though, polishing it properly before its release.

For both musicians, their passion for music is the driving force in this exciting journey.

"If music moves you and is done with passion, that's the most important thing," says Nicholls.

"The song has to be strong," Cannings agrees. "It has to move you, make you feel alive. I hope our music does that for people." **FT**

PROG FILE



LINE-UP

Sharon Cannings *(vocals, keys, mandolin),* **Martin Nicholls** *(guitar, cello)*

SOUNDS LIKE

An experimental blend of folk, classic and prog rock with darkly atmospheric melodies and captivating lyrics

CURRENT RELEASE

Lit By Lightning is out now via Bandcamp

WEBSITE

www.candacraig.net

PROG PRESENTS NEW MUSIC
Listen to CANDACRAIG all this month on PROGZILLA RADIO
progzilla.com/listen/

"If music moves you and is done with passion, that's the most important thing."

If music be the food of love, play on! Cannings and Nicholls ditched acting for prog.

PRESS/JNEAL RYLATT

BILL FISHER

The Church Of The Cosmic Skull frontman discusses thinking like a billionaire, running his own DIY label, and "yacht doom".

Words: Dave Everley **Portrait:** Zorad

'Brother Bill' Fisher is a busy man. As well as leading Nottingham's brilliant, multi-headed musical pseudo-cult Church Of The Cosmic Skull, the hirsute multi-instrumentalist has also released three solo albums, which fuse lush musicality with the same slyly satirical worldview that characterises his band. The latest is the wryly titled *How To Think Like A Billionaire*. Written largely on an old-school Yamaha PSR-8000 keyboard, it draws on everything from 70s soft rock, prog and 80s art-pop to grinding metal – something Fisher, who plays all the instruments on the album, describes as "yacht doom".

"When Stevie Wonder did *Songs In The Key Of Life*, he decided to embrace the chunkiness of the Yamaha sound," he says. "I thought, 'If it's good enough for him, it's good enough for me...'"

'Yacht doom' – that's a new one. What is it?
The theme of the album is all about the tech billionaire worship that's so prevalent today, so the idea of writing these yacht rock songs with some heavy, downtuned guitars in there made sense. I've been listening to not much else other than Steely Dan for the past year, for better or worse. A lot of the songs on the album have triad notes over interesting bass notes, which is taken a little bit from Steely Dan or even 90s James Taylor. There are Kate Bush and Peter Gabriel influences in there too. I was born in 1981, so I grew up when that really video-centric, dark, arty sound was everywhere. Even the pop end of Genesis – it's interesting to see how these amazingly talented musicians experimented with pop.

"Selling out Madison Square Garden isn't the goal for us. Something doesn't have to be massive for it to be working out."

Where did that theme come from? What have tech billionaires ever done to hurt you?
The first song, *Overview Effect*, is all about that space race where you had [Jeff] Bezos, [Elon] Musk and [Richard] Branson all competing to be the first in orbit. They're all trying to build the biggest, fastest, most phallic rocket. There was this period after Covid when that stuff was all over the news, and it all came together as this idea of the poor billionaire up in his tin can, experiencing the overview effect of looking down on mankind and being all sad. The thing that really grinds my gears the most is aspirational Tories looking at these people, going, "Fair play guys, great way to run a business." Which is basically everything I stand against.

The album cover is a painting of a tech mogul who looks suspiciously like you sipping a Martini in a spaceship while looking down at a massive explosion on Earth, presumably after pressing the big red button in front of him...
That sums the whole thing up. If he's just pressed the big red button, where's he going to get the rest of the Martinis from? It's the ultimate self-obsessed, self-destructive situation.

So, are you still using X [Twitter] and Facebook?
Yeah. I've done sponsored posts, as every band does. That's the irony of ironies: paying Zuckerberg to show people who like good music songs that are denouncing him.

***Ride On, Unicorn* from the new record sounds like it could fit on a Church album. How you decide what goes where?**
Audio-wise, that one suits Church – it's the only one that's major key or positive and upbeat musically. But the lyrical theme fits this album – it's about 'unicorn' tech companies [private companies that are worth at least $1bn] and the whole tech bubble, and the ludicrous optimism that everything can keep growing and growing and never stop. Throwing it on a Church album felt a little weird.

Are your solo albums, Church Of The Cosmic Skull and your other band, Massive Hassle, connected in any way, like some Marvel-style Extended Bill Fisher Universe?
Certainly with the solo stuff and Church, there are things that are tied in. That bizarre 70s/80s human potential movement is an influence on both of them – the whole self-help, self-improvement universe with all the weird techniques that come with them. *How To Think Like A Billionaire* comes from that – also, Donald Trump has a book called *Think Like A Billionaire, Become A Billionaire*, too. But they're not really linked as such, otherwise I would have done the solo albums as Brother Bill. And Massive Hassle, which is a project I do with my brother [Marty], is a more personal thing.

You release your albums via your own label, Septaphonic. How hard is it to be a DIY artist in 2024?
The DIY thing is working. When Church was starting, we released the first album on an indie label, Kozmik Artifactz in Germany. After that, we started getting offers from bigger independent labels. I looked at it as, "Well, if we've got our own internet shop set up, what's the point in a label taking a percentage of what we make or, worse, owning the recording?" I spent a year after that first Church record learning what the music industry was doing. It seemed like it was actually possible. But, it's still easier said than done – with the internet, anybody can do it themselves, but the music has to be good and everything about it has to be eye-catching.

What's the best thing about doing it all yourself?
I record everything we do myself, so there's not that much of an outlay of money to do the actual recording. And there's obviously an OCD thing of having control of every little bit of what you do yourself. But I'm not hugely fussed about growing and growing and growing. Selling out Madison Square Garden isn't the goal for us. Something doesn't have to be massive for it to be working out.

What's next for you?
We've got another Massive Hassle album coming out in a couple of months. We're going to record more Church stuff this year. And there's Dystopian Future Movies, which is Caroline's [Cawley, aka Church Of The Cosmic Skull's Sister Caroline and Bill's partner] project, which I'm involved in as well – she's singing, I play drums. It's kind of proggy, grungy, post-rock with doomy elements.

So, how *do* you think like a billionaire?
Destructively.

How To Think Like A Billionaire is out now via Septaphonic. See billfisher.net for more information.

IN MEMORY OF
MIKE PINDER

As co-founder of **The Moody Blues**, keyboardist Mike Pinder played a significant role in transforming the group from an R&B/beat combo into a chart-topping symphonic progressive powerhouse. He created music from the heart and used his detailed knowledge of the Mellotron to great effect on some of the Moodies' best-loved songs. His impact on the world of progressive music will continue to be felt by generations to come.

Words: Jerry Ewing

Mike Pinder, keyboard player and founding member of The Moody Blues, died on April 24, aged 82. He was the last surviving founding member of the band — drummer Graeme Edge died in 2021; vocalist and flautist Ray Thomas died in 2018; original bassist Clint Warwick died in 2004; while original guitarist Denny Laine, who later found fame with Paul McCartney and Wings, passed away last year.

His family said in a statement, "Michael Thomas Pinder died on Wednesday, April 24, 2024 at his home in Northern California, surrounded by his devoted family. Michael's family would like to share with his trusted friends and caring fans that he passed peacefully. His final days were filled with music, encircled by the love of his family. Michael lived his life with a childlike wonder, walking a deeply introspective path which fused the mind and the heart.

"He created his music and the message he shared with the world from this spiritually grounded place; as he always said, 'Keep your head above the clouds, but keep your feet on the ground.' His authentic essence lifted up everyone who came into contact with him. His lyrics, philosophy, and vision of humanity and our place in the cosmos will touch generations to come."

The 1965 Moody Blues line-up, L-R: Ray Thomas, Mike Pinder, Denny Laine, Graeme Edge, Clint Warwick.

CHRIS WARE/KEYSTONE FEATURES/GETTY IMAGES

Pinder's former Moody Blues colleague, John Lodge, responded to the news with: "All the love possible goes out from the Lodge family to Mike's family today... RIP."

Frontman Justin Hayward said: "Mike was a natural-born musician who could play any style of music with warmth and love. His reimagining and rebuilding (literally) of the Mellotron gave us our identifiable early sound. He was a huge part of my own musical journey. My sincere condolences to his loving and devoted family."

Born in Erdington in Birmingham on December 27, 1941, the young Pinder was furnished with the nickname 'Mickey The Moon Boy' due to an ongoing fascination with outer space and rockets, two things that would remain a steady influence on his musical ideas for years to come. He would later feature in local bands Checkers, El Riot And The Rebels (with whom Pinder supported The Beatles in 1963) and also the Krew Kats, before he took a job as a development engineer — responsible for testing and quality control at Streetly Electronics in Birmingham, who manufactured the very first Mellotrons in the UK. As well as the music he created with The Moody Blues and his pioneering work with the Mellotron, Pinder will best be remembered as a keen advocate of technology.

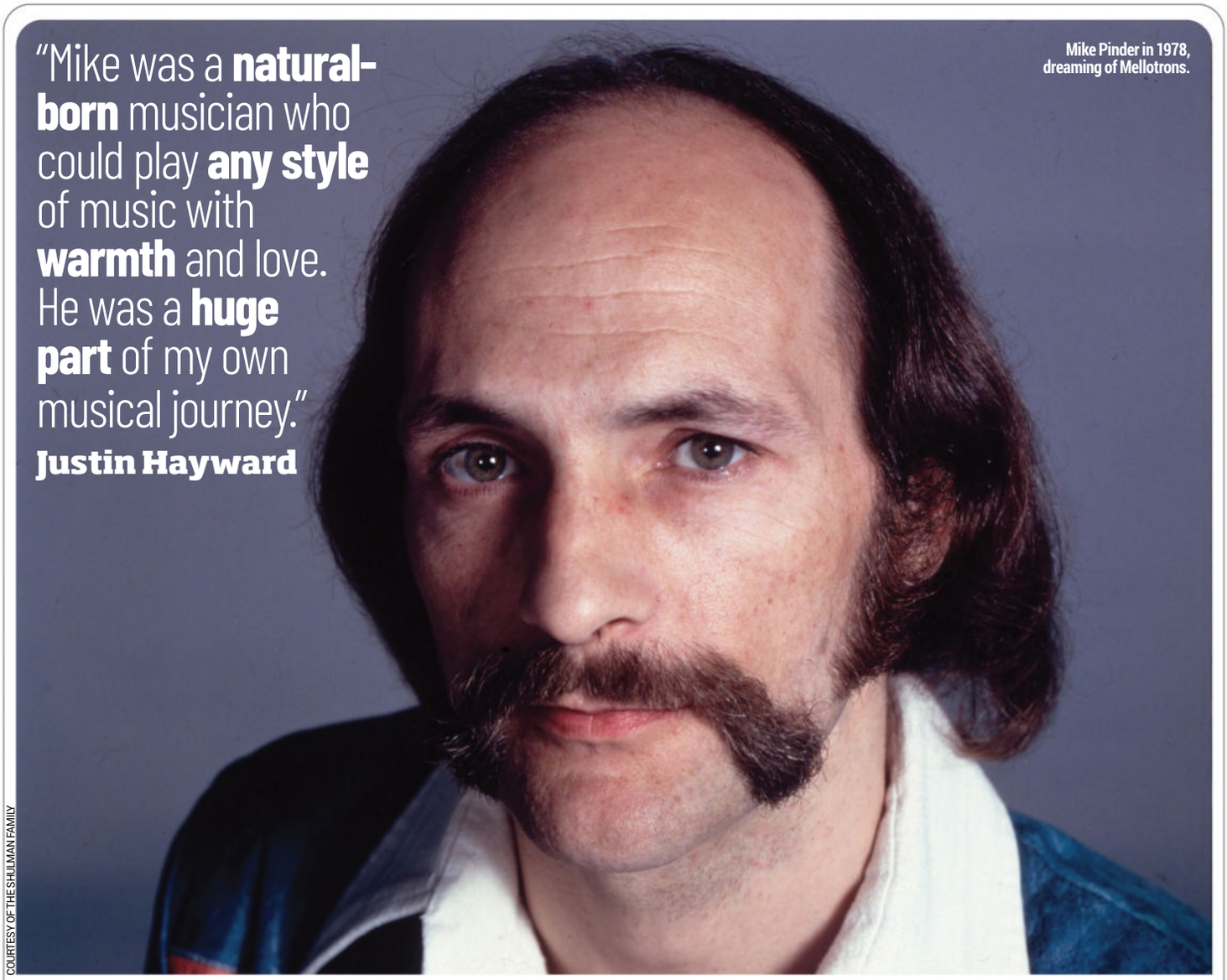
Pinder helped form The Moody Blues back in 1964 and they had an early hit when *Go Now,* from the band's 1965 debut album *The Magnificent Moodies*, hit the No.1 spot in the UK singles charts. However the band's initial R'n'B/beat sound failed to find favour with

The band in 1969, L-R: Mike Pinder, John Lodge, Graeme Edge, Ray Thomas, Justin Hayward.

CHRIS WALTER/WIREIMAGE/GETTY IMAGES

"Mike was a **natural-born** musician who could play **any style** of music with **warmth** and love. He was a **huge part** of my own musical journey."

Justin Hayward



Mike Pinder in 1978, dreaming of Mellotrons.

COURTESY OF THE SHULMAN FAMILY

listeners, forcing them into a rethink. At Pinder's suggestion the band recruited a young Swindon musician by the name of Justin Hayward to replace the departed Laine. With the addition of bassist John Lodge, the band rose in popularity, gradually adopting a more progressive and symphonic sound with their second album *Days Of Future Passed*, which famously was supposed to have been a recording of Antonin Dvořák's *New World Symphony* to promote Decca Records' new Deramic Stereo Sound audio format in order to wipe out the debt the band had accrued at the label.

Instrumental in this was Pinder's purchase of an early Mellotron from Streetly Electronics; he promptly removed all the special effects and doubled the strings section. He even introduced John Lennon to the instrument, later used on The Beatles' 1967 hit *Strawberry Fields Forever*.

The mix of Pinder's symphonic keyboard sound and the youthful and dynamic combination of Hayward and Lodge helped push The Moody Blues to the forefront of the progressive rock scene in the late 60s and early 70s, with albums such as *In Search Of The Lost Chord* (1968), *On The Threshold Of A Dream* (1969) and *Seventh Sojourn* (1972).

During the Moodies' mid-70s hiatus, Pinder relocated to Malibu in California. When they reconvened in 1977 to begin work on what would become their ninth studio album, *Octave*, inter-band friction meant that he declined full participation. He was eventually replaced by former Yes keyboardist Patrick Moraz in 1978.

Pinder released his debut solo album, *The Promise*, through the Moodies' record label Threshold in 1976. It included material collated during the band's hiatus from 1972. *Among The Stars* followed in 1994 and *A Planet With One Mind* a year later. In 1996 he released A *People With One Heart*, which set inspirational stories narrated by Pinder about other cultures to soothing music. He continued his fascination with technology by working as a consultant for the Atari Corporation.

Happy to stay out of the limelight, Pinder was inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall Of Fame as a member of The Moody Blues in 2018 alongside Edge, Hayward, Lodge and Laine. He was the only member of the band who did not give an acceptance speech, later saying, "By the time the Moodies took the stage we were five hours into the ceremony. The oldest of the inductees were up the latest. The speeches were a bit anti-climatic at that point, and it was only fitting that the current touring members spoke first.

"I am happy that we finally got inducted for our fans' sake. As I have said for the last 30 years, 'The fans are my hall of fame.'"

Mike Pinder
December 27, 1941-April 24, 2024

All smiles with John Lodge at the Rock & Roll Hall Of Fame Induction Ceremony, April 14, 2018.

JEFF KRAVITZ/FILMMAGIC/GETTY IMAGES

IN MEMORY OF
RICHARD TANDY

Best known as the long-standing keyboardist in **Electric Light Orchestra**, Richard Tandy's instrumentation was a key part of the Birmingham band's sound, including on the Top 10 hit, *Mr Blue Sky*. Described by drummer Bev Bevan as Jeff Lynne's "right-hand man", he played on nearly all their studio albums, and also worked with George Harrison, Tom Petty and The Everly Brothers. He died in May at the age of 76.

Words: Jerry Ewing

Notably the only musician who featured in three different incarnations of ELO, alongside bandleader Jeff Lynne, Richard Tandy joined the futuristic progressive pop act in 1972, two years after their formation. He remained a full-time member until Lynne disbanded the group in 1986, following the *Balance Of Power* album. Alongside Lynne, he was also part of the short-lived reformation from 2000-2001 on the back of the *Zoom* album — the only member from the band's earlier incarnation to do so. And he was by Lynne's side when he resurrected the band in 2013 for their most recent run of success that was kickstarted by an appearance on fundraising BBC TV show Children In Need, under the name Jeff Lynne And Friends. It was here that Lynne and Tandy, backed by the BBC Concert Orchestra, performed *Livin' Thing* and *Mr Blue Sky* at the Children in Need Rocks concert at the Eventim Apollo in Hammersmith, London.

Richard Tandy in 2015.

VIVIEN KILLILEA/WIREIMAGE/GETTY IMAGES

In a statement announcing Tandy's passing on social media, Lynne said, "It is with great sadness that I share the news of the passing of my long-time collaborator and dear friend Richard Tandy. He was a remarkable musician and friend and I'll cherish the lifetime of memories we had together. Sending all my love to Sheila and the Tandy family."

Bev Bevan, an original member of both The Move and Electric Light Orchestra, with whom he drummed until 1986, told BBC Radio WM: "He was a really dedicated musician. He really studied his craft.

"I spent a lot of time with Richard. First and foremost, he was a wonderful musician. He was a good bass player: he started out as a guitarist and he taught himself how to play keyboards. He became an amazingly good pianist — he mastered all the Moog synthesisers. Every keyboard you could name, he could play, and he was a really dedicated musician who really studied his craft. He was a quiet man and a lovely, lovely guy.

"He was Jeff Lynne's right-hand man. He was with Jeff Lynne all the time in the studio. I couldn't drag them out. They'd get in the studio at midday and I'd be dragging them out at three o'clock in the morning saying, 'Come on, we've got to go to bed now!'

ELO in 1973, L-R: Richard Tandy, Michael d'Albuquerque, Bev Bevan, Jeff Lynne (seated), Wilfred Gibson, Colin Walker, Mike Edwards.

FIN COSTELLO/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

"Richard was there at the start. When we first started it was a real experimental thing. There were about eight of us. Richard was there with me, with Jeff, and when we finished our last album there were just three of us on it. Jeff Lynne, myself and Richard Tandy. We spent a lot of time together, in the studio, on the road, and I have nothing but fond memories of him. He was a lovely, lovely guy."

Born in Birmingham on March 26, 1948, Tandy was at school with future Move and ELO drummer Bev Bevan. Tandy would go on to play harpsichord on The Move's 1968 No.1 hit *Blackberry Way*, and even fill in on bass for the band for a short time.

"I remember walking into the Olympic Studio in London and seeing a Burns electric harpsichord. I played a few E minor chords and Jeff and Roy thought it would be good for the song," Tandy told *King Of The Universe* fanzine back in 1999 of the recording of the song. "If you listen carefully you can hear it, especially in the middle eight."

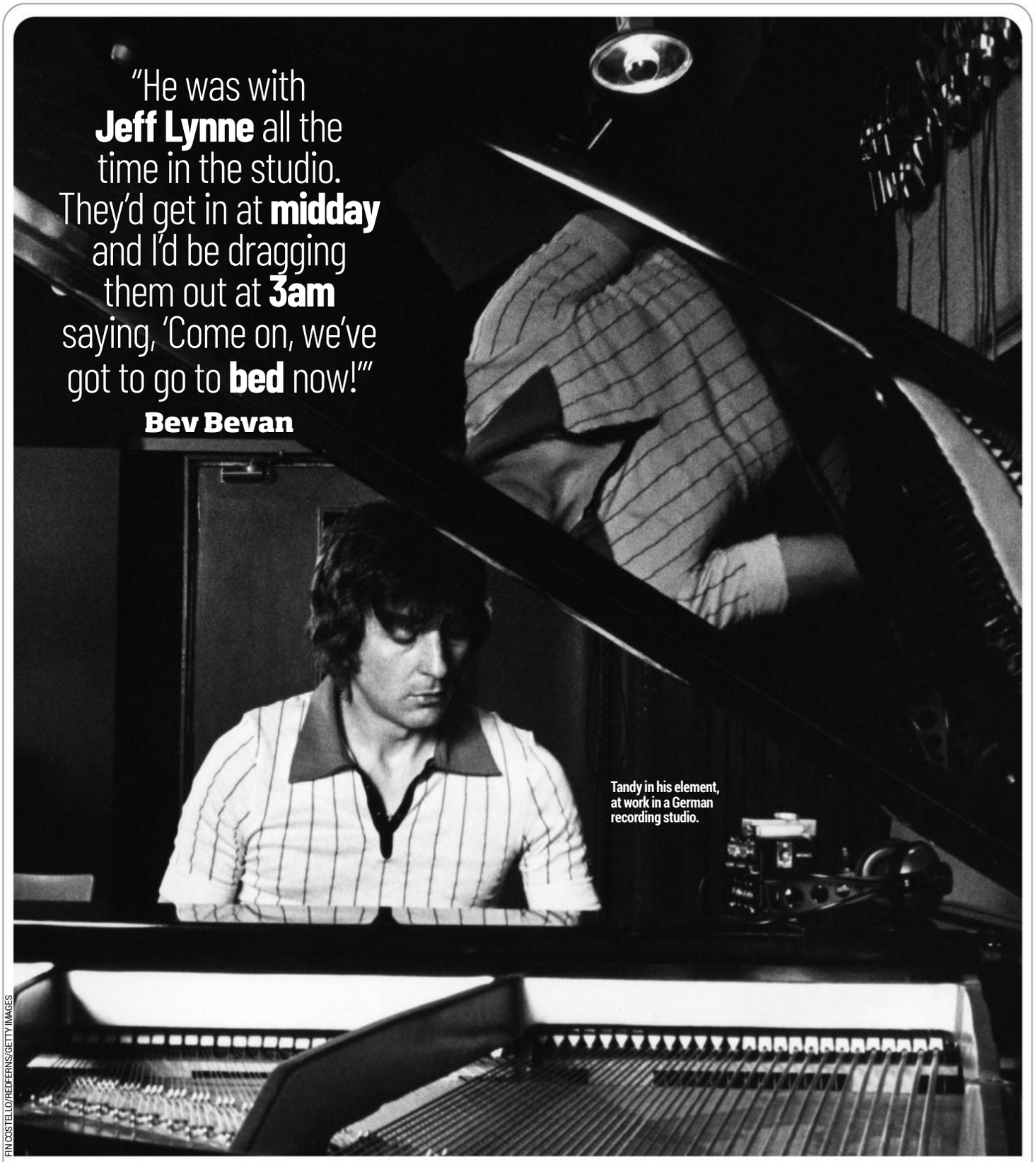
Tandy played bass for ELO during his first year with the band, before moving to keyboards, where his lush sound helped propel them and their mix of progressive rock and Beatles-esque pop to the top of the UK album charts in the late 70s. From 1974 album *Eldorado* onwards, he, Lynne and musician-arranger Louis Clark were responsible for the band's famous string arrangements.

"The first gig, at the Greyhound, was memorable: the first tune, *10538* [*Overture*], was good, but then all the changes between tunes became confusing and I guess it all got shambolic," Tandy recalled of the band's debut live show in Croydon. "After that, as far as I was concerned, things just went from one good thing to another."

Tandy's initial keyboard set-up featured a Minimoog and a Wurlitzer electric piano, later adding a Mellotron (largely for stage use), and Hohner Clavinet. He also played harmonium on the track *Kuiama* from 1973's *ELO 2*.

"For me, the period from 1971-1986 was fantastic, and I consider myself very lucky to have been a part of it," he previously observed.

Tandy appeared on every ELO album, aside from their 1971 self-titled debut and 2015's comeback (as Jeff Lynne's ELO) *Alone In The Universe*, on which Lynne himself



Tandy in his element, at work in a German recording studio.

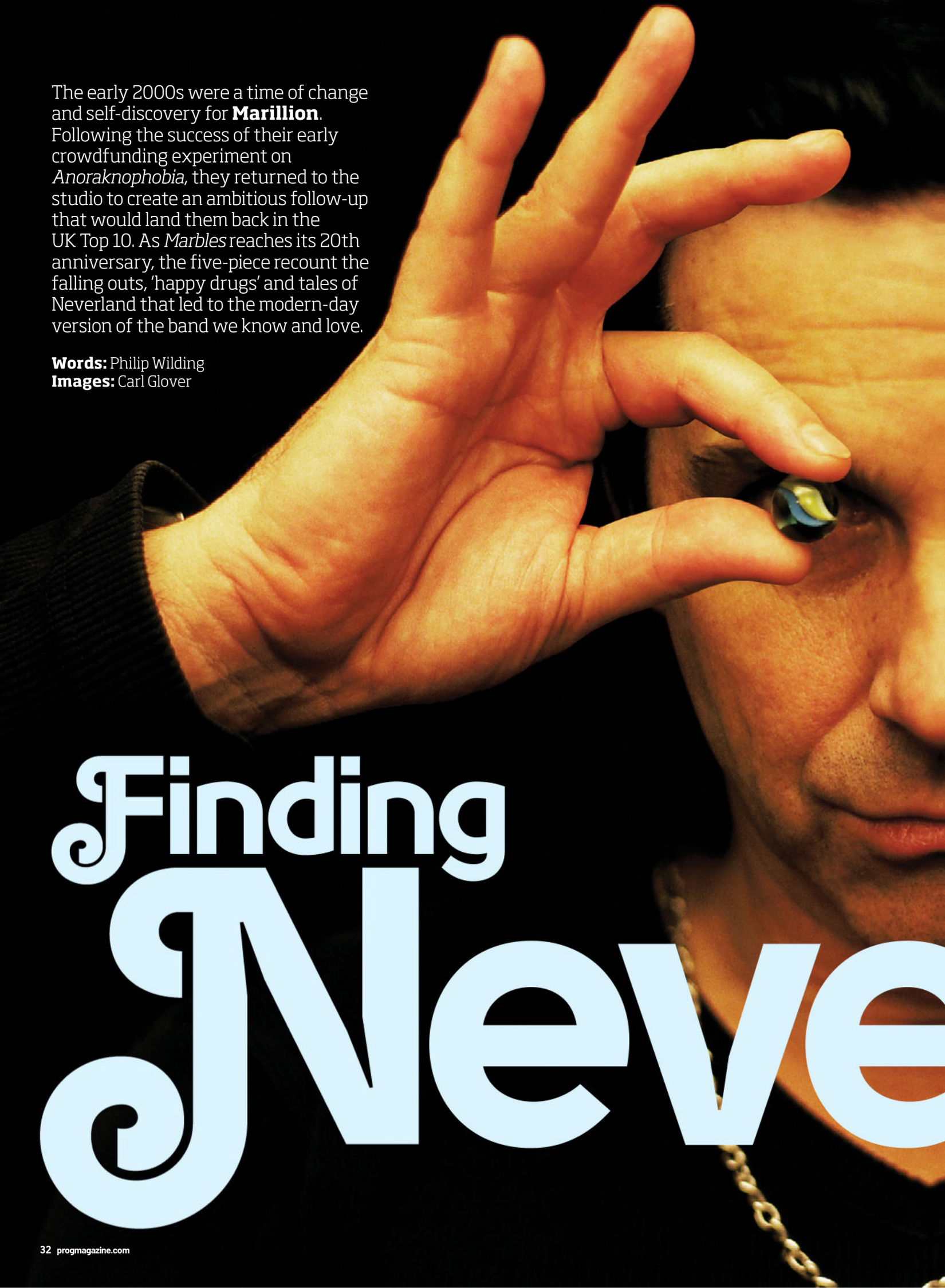
FIN COSTELLO/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

performed all instruments, but he was credited with a piano solo on *One More Time* from 2019's *From Out Of Nowhere*. Tandy teamed up with Lynne on Giorgio Moroder's 1984 soundtrack to the film *Electric Dreams,* and played on Lynne's solo album, 1990's *Armchair Theatre*.

Outside ELO, he worked with George Harrison, Tom Petty, The Everly Brothers, Dave Edmunds and Julianna Raye, among others. He also formed The Tandy Morgan Band with Dave Morgan. Morgan was a Birmingham musician who had performed with Tandy in local band The Uglys in the 1960s, and a spin-off group, Balls, alongside Steve Gibbons and Trevor Burton, before being replaced by Denny Laine. He would also work with Magnum as an early bass player and vocalist, although left before they released their debut. With Morgan, Tandy would release the concept album *Earth Rise* in 1985, which was produced by Steve Lipson, who would later find fame with the ZTT label and as a member of Trevor Horn's pop-prog ensemble Producers. A second collection of material, *B.C. Collection*, appeared in 1992.

Tandy married twice and lived in Birmingham, France and Los Angeles, before settling in Wales in the mid-2010s. He's survived by his second wife, Sheila.

Richard Tandy
March 26, 1948-May 1, 2024



Finding Neve

The early 2000s were a time of change and self-discovery for **Marillion**. Following the success of their early crowdfunding experiment on *Anoraknophobia*, they returned to the studio to create an ambitious follow-up that would land them back in the UK Top 10. As *Marbles* reaches its 20th anniversary, the five-piece recount the falling outs, 'happy drugs' and tales of Neverland that led to the modern-day version of the band we know and love.

Words: Philip Wilding
Images: Carl Glover

"The past is foreign country, they do things differently there." It's unlikely that LP Hartley, author of *The Go-Between*, was referring to experimenting with ecstasy for the first time in your late 40s while working on a new album, but this is the seemingly alien landscape that singer Steve 'H' Hogarth found himself in as Marillion began the lengthy and ultimately rewarding process of making the hugely creative *Marbles*.

"Let me tell you: ecstasy – it's the way to go, for a little while at least," says Hogarth, you can almost see the twinkle in his eye.

He's on the phone at home and we've been chatting about the band's mindset post-*Anoraknophobia* and its industry-changing, crowdfunding model. A similar question to other members of Marillion had them

"I think this was the record where I did change how I wrote, absolutely."

Steve 'H' Hogarth

erland

"Sometimes you know you might be catching lightning in a bottle, and as soon as we had some of it written, we knew we were on to something good."

Mark Kelly

"I thought you said the pub was this way?" The path to *Marbles* wasn't always clear.

reflecting on the lean commercial years of the Castle albums like *Marillion.com*, and how *Marbles* had brought them blinking back into the creative and critical light. But not Hogarth.

"In a sense, it was quite an interesting time. I remember being down in the West Country working on [closing track] *Neverland*. Just, you know… just in love with everything. But particularly Mark's opening chords for that song and all of us being so in love with it that we didn't want to fuck the rest of the song up, so we just kept going round and round, and of course, being somewhat high on ecstasy. I was quite happy to go round and round…"

It's 2002 and Marillion are no longer in a state of flux. The 90s started with the promise of *Holidays In Eden*, but their major-label dreams were dashed by the middle of the decade after EMI shrugged them off following the prolonged and poorly received (by the label, at least) *Brave* sessions and album. Even though the band rallied with the career-defining *Afraid Of Sunlight*, it wasn't enough to keep them cloistered as a major label priority. The end of the decade saw them deliver three albums in as many years, only to find refuge in a new kind of crowdfunding model that not only kept them propped up as a working band, but gave them the breathing space to create new music, too. It was no coincidence that *Anoraknophobia* was a creative leap from *Marillion.com*, but *Marbles* was to be something else again.

"Some albums are key moments in our musical journey," says Pete Trewavas, "and I think *Marbles* is definitely one. I think *Anoraknophobia* might have been one, too, because having done that, it allowed us to relax. It gave us breathing space to recognise a bit more of our original DNA and what made us the band we were. You forget that when you're on this musical treadmill sometimes."

"We were feeling very positive at that point," adds Steve Rothery about the period leading up to the recording of *Marbles*.

"With *Anoraknophobia* being so well received, it finally felt like we'd escaped the clutches of independent labels. And, you know, could concentrate on trying to make a world-class record. We went down to Sil Willcox's place outside of Bath to work — he managed the Stranglers and the Wurzels — and we drank scrumpy [strong cider] and played around with the songs there. That's where *You're Gone* came from [see box-out on p39], my faffing around with the Logic sequencer where you can memorise chords and play them with one finger, which is about my level on a keyboard."

Mark Kelly plays us the opening chords to *Neverland*. He's seated in his home studio surrounded by keyboards, gold discs on the wall behind him. We're chatting over Zoom when he plays what would become the opening to a song that's still a staple of the band's live set more than two decades later.

"I liked that place near Bath," he says. "A cottage more than a rehearsal space, really, but that's where I came up with these chords for *Neverland*; the components, at least. And everybody was like, 'Oh, that sounds interesting.' That was right from the start and then later we had things like *Invisible Man*, which was really exciting. Sometimes you know you might be catching lightning in a bottle, and as soon as we had some of it written, we knew we were on to something good. There was definitely a good atmosphere around the band at that time."

"That time in Bath was just so relaxed," says Rothery. "We felt less pressure that we had to do an album quickly. All in all, it was a nice vibe, lots of good memories. I vividly remember the Wurzels being in the next studio, and H being in there at one point talking to them."

"Was I?" says Hogarth, surprised. "They were in the room next to us and I was feeling very open, for the reasons I mentioned, so it wouldn't surprise me if I did pop in to say hello.

"I liked that space, and Pete used to drive us to this pub — as Pete had stopped drinking by then, so he was our designated driver — with this really gothic name, The Lynching, or something welcoming like that. It didn't have a bar, you'd go in and this little old woman would come scurrying out, look us up and down, scurry back and then come out with this jug of cider. I assume it was cider, but it tasted like the stuff you put into radiators when they're clogged up, which didn't seem to bother us, so we'd drink that and then go back and try and think of what to do with *Neverland* for hours."

"I'd stopped drinking by then. I was on cloudy lemonade as the rest of the guys drank scrumpy," says Trewavas, who, as we speak, is recovering from heart surgery and in remarkable spirits. "I liked that cottage," he muses. "It was on this estate, and we had a big room that we turned into a rehearsal room. But because it was in the middle of nowhere, it didn't matter that it wasn't particularly well soundproofed.

"What I liked about it most was that it reminded me of the mushroom farm on the way to Brighton where we did the writing sessions for *Seasons End*. We didn't really know what we were doing back then, everything was so new with H, we didn't have any preconceived ideas. We had music, he had lyrics and we had to take it

Shape Of The Art: Making The Marbles cover

Kids, marbles and a sense of the uncanny - how Carl Glover came up with an eye-catching design.

"We've had issues with various album covers," says Mark Kelly when the subject of the striking *Marbles* artwork comes up.

He and Steve Hogarth had a falling out over the giant Christ the Redeemer statue that was originally fêted for the cover of *Afraid Of Sunlight* – Kelly initially worried that it gave off Christian rock overtones – and it subsequently became the fluorescent Jesus featured on the cover on the 2019 reissue. But that's a story for another time.

"When Carl [Glover] showed us *that* it was like the first time we saw *Brave*, instantly, it was like, 'Yep, that's the one.'"

Like *Brave*, an album that ventured into very dark places in strange and beautiful ways, *Marbles* confounded the listener. Bright pop sensibilities, rich melodies underpinning what sounded like something falling apart, a protagonist slowly unravelling, the glint of madness in their eye as they disappear into the darkness.

Designer Carl Glover captured that eloquent despair in *Brave* and did so again for *Marbles*. The cover features the faces of his niece Kezzie and nephew Jack morphed together, with marbles held over their eyes. Some special editions included the sublime flourish of a varnished marble over the top of the design, only visible when it caught the light.

"I felt all the music was strong, that we had the songs we needed, but you never knew how a Marillion album's going to be received," says Steve Rothery. "So it's always good when the artwork feels right and reflects what you're trying to do with the music, if it's up to scratch, as it were. And I think with *Marbles* it worked really well. It's very interesting. Initially, we had the boy's face and the girl's face, and I suggested putting the two halves of each image together. So you have this perfectly symmetrical face, which just doesn't happen in real life, and there's something really disconcerting about that; you look at it and even though it seems fine, your brain is telling you that something is not quite right because it's so *right*, if that makes sense?"

Seeing is believing: Carl Glover.

"Marbles had a difficult birth cover-wise, but I was pleased with how it turned out," says Glover, a man who's spent a considerable amount of his career having artwork ideas sent back, not least by Marillion.

"Especially since some of the alternate cover ideas became divider-spreads between song imagery in the 128-page special edition. There were about a dozen or so *Marbles* cover ideas; what was chosen was definitely the best!"

"I don't know why. Ostensibly it's just a kid holding marbles over each eye, but it just struck me, bang!" says Mark Kelly. "It's the brother and sister thing, and they're split in half, I don't know why, but it's quite affecting. And even though it's only marbles they're holding, they become almost alien-looking in that context, otherworldly. That perfectly symmetrical face, it's a weird vibe, what do they call it, uncanny valley? It's got a little bit of that." **PW**

Kezzie and Jack's faces were merged together to create the disconcerting cover image.

from there. In a way, this session was the same because I think we went down there to try and kickstart something, become a gang again.

"The great thing about being in a band, and the thing you really forget when you've got your own studio like Racket and you're going home to the wives and kids, [is that] you're in a gang. You start out when you're kids, and it's an 'us against the world' sort of thing. There's a real gang mentality to being in a proper band, so it was great to get back to that place and that energy again for a while. I think that's why those sessions were so fruitful, so productive."

No surprise, then, that the whimsical, Syd Barrett-like *Drilling Holes* (as opposed to the Pink Floyd-esque arena rock of *Neverland*) revisited those early days of the band after the departure of Fish, when they'd moved from the mushroom farm and into album sessions for *Seasons End* at Hook End Manor.

"We had such a wonderful time. It was very sort of the *Famous Five* meets Lord Byron," remembers Hogarth. "I felt like I'd become [Byron]: flouncing around in this big shirt, having young girls bringing me BLTs and jugs of Pimm's on perfect summer days. And in the evenings, we used to make hot air balloons out of birthday candles and balsa wood and stuff. We just had the best time whilst making *Seasons End*. And that level of decadence was new to me; I thought I'd died and gone to Heaven. And so that's sort of what that song is about.

"But it was also a kind of wordplay experiment, too. It all started because our engineer just happened to say to me, 'Oh, a man came to drill holes in the afternoon, he was talking about putting in a new hot-water heater in the studio.' And I said, 'I suppose by the evening most of the afternoon would have gone,' which got no response, but that was the starting point and it got more playful and more Spike Milligan/*See Emily Play*-like from there."

"I love playing *Drilling Holes*, it's fun, but it's a lovely song, too, such a good vibe," says Ian Mosley.

"I remember, with that song, sitting in Racket behind the kit and Mike Hunter was in the studio mixing it: it sounded great. We were at that point trying to finish the record, so Mike's mixing one thing, and [producer] Dave Meegan was in the control room mixing something else. We even had Steven Wilson in at one point working on *Genie* and *Angelina*, just trying to get it all finished. People mixing everywhere! So, I'm sitting there watching Mike work on *Drilling Holes*, and it's sounding so good, and then the door opens, and Dave walks in.

Steve Rothery: eye see you!

"I felt all the music was strong, that we had the songs we needed, but you never knew how a Marillion album's going to be received."

Steve Rothery

Mark Kelly: eyeing up the finish line.

"Thank God *Marbles* was such a good record, or the next four or five years might have finished us off."

Mark Kelly

Mike just looks up — he's a Liverpudlian — and he goes, 'What the fuck do you want?' Which really made me laugh!"

It would be Meegan's last album with the band. The final weeks, as referenced by Mosley, were a gruelling series of mixing sessions with Hunter, Wilson and Meegan all trying to make the album sing before Marillion had to deliver the record and head out on tour.

Talk about the impact Meegan had on the band now and they have nothing but praise for the man who first worked with them as an assistant engineer on *Fugazi*. Although it's not hard to see why *Marbles* became his last record with them.

"Dave is a genius," says Rothery, "but sometimes his methodology is quite slow. With *Marbles*, he and I had a falling out, too. It was very gentlemanly, very polite, but he said to me that he knew more about what the Marillion audience wanted than the band did. That was a bit strange and quite arrogant, I thought. I kind of fell out with him a little bit, which, looking back, was very immature of me. I think it was one of those things where people sometimes say things without thinking. But overall, I had a fantastic working relationship with Dave, he really understood what I did and even encouraged me, so it was a shame that we fell out, but that's life, I suppose."

"I think we just felt like it was probably time for a bit of a change," says Mosley. "Mike had started working with us and we thought: 'We can't afford to spend another three or four years on the next album as well.' So our approach was changing, and we were pulling in slightly different directions."

"Church," says Hogarth cryptically when the subject of Dave Meegan comes up.

"I was mixing *The Only Unforgivable Thing* and Meegan would come in and listen and go, 'More church!' and go out again. Just about everything Dave ever did was rooted in the Roman Catholic religion, and his past, you know, being brought up in Dublin, but with a very strict Catholic mother… It was very deep with David. So I think he heard a lot of music through that lens and brought those things out in it. Although I wasn't writing about religion or the church or his strange upbringing, he would be looking for some aspect of that kind of darkness and mysticism."

It was Meegan, too, who suggested breaking down one of Hogarth's lyrics into four parts to make up the linking pieces that would tie the album together as *Marbles I-IV*.

"I had this song idea, this one long lyric, and Dave looked at it and without hesitating said, 'What if we cut this up into sections and treated each section differently musically, and kept returning to it?' Which was a clever take on what is ostensibly one song sung across the album," he recalls.

"I tell you what else Dave was good at, from a singer's viewpoint: the days when I couldn't find my voice. And I don't mean the tone or melody, but the soul of the song. You listen to something like *Fantastic Place*, producing that sort of soul, getting to that space isn't easy. And Dave was so good at that, he would stick me in front of the mic and I'd do a few takes and he'd go, 'You haven't got it today, we'll come back tomorrow.' He was looking for this kind of introspective honesty, he wasn't really looking for pitch or diction, or any of the things that as a singer you normally can't concentrate on. He was looking for something that perhaps he could *feel* rather than hear, and I'd go home feeling sort of defeated and shit without really knowing what he was after. He couldn't describe it, but he knew once it happened and he'd capture it, and all kudos to Dave for pinning down the soul and really being sensitive to that. Not all producers can do that."

Marillion's *Marbles* not only changed the way the band did business, but there's an argument to be made that sonically, it was part of the musical arc from *Afraid Of Sunlight* all the way to *Sounds That Can't Be Made*, *FEAR* and *An Hour Before It's Dark*. It's an idea that Hogarth resists, as it happens, but he will concede that *Marbles* opened him up lyrically the way no Marillion album had before.

Talking to the rest of the band now, it's striking to note the fragility and openness of the singer's words, not least in *The Invisible Man* and the openly raw take on the state of his marriage in *The Only Unforgivable Thing*.

"He talks a lot about escaping, too, on that record," says Kelly. "Those themes are there."

"He does so much soul-searching on that album, doesn't he?" says Trewavas. "And the good thing about that is that it makes everybody else soul-search, too. A song like *The Only Unforgivable Thing*, I've never had the nerve just to say exactly what I think at any given time. That's one of the beauties and strengths of Steve's lyrics and part of his legacy, I think, is that he will just lay it out. He's unflinching like that."

Hogarth chips in, "I think this was the record where I did change how I wrote, absolutely. Probably more so than ever before. Perhaps *Marbles* marked the beginning of a sort of confessional writing. To be honest, it's kind of become a huge rod for my back really because now when I write, unless I write something from the centre of myself, it feels a bit vacuous, you know, by comparison."

"I have to admit," says Mosley with a smile, "that if H is having a rough time or is in a bad place, then we're usually in for a good album!"

You're Gone: Charting The Single

They'd been absent from the UK's Top 10 since the 80s, but Marillion scored a long-awaited hit with *You're Gone*.

Some things you never see coming, and a latter-career hit single was probably one of them. The choppy, rhythmic loop of *You're Gone*, the lead track from *Marbles*, reached No.7 on the UK's Official Singles Chart, their first Top 10 since 1987's *Incommunicado*. The Dutch, who like Marillion the way a cat likes cream, propelled it to No.8 in their Top 40. Quite the turnaround for a band who'd had to revert to crowdfunding their previous album, *Anoraknophobia*.

"Still didn't stop people asking me about Fish, though," Steve Hogarth observes wryly.

"It was funny, we couldn't believe it. You have this Top 10 hit and suddenly everyone gets excited and starts phoning you up. I haven't changed, I haven't done anything different, and now you're all doing backflips because of a number on a chart. It's very weird from the artist's point of view. I remember someone from Radio 4's *Front Row* programme wanted to talk to me suddenly, and one of his questions was, 'Do you think motivating your friends to buy your record so you can have a hit single is a distortion of the marketplace?' That was his question. How dare you make this happen in spite of the BBC, as they certainly weren't playing it. This 'stay in your lane' sort of vibe. That said, perhaps it was just a clever question to see what it would draw out?

"The song itself was built on this loop and not a conventional structure, it came out of Steve [Rothery] playing around with Logic. He wrote these sections on the computer with a keyboard and it was this new sound that we thought was kind of interesting. It's not what you would play by choice. Like there was a little bit missing, there's a lot of our music that is like that, even when we're jamming, Mark [Kelly] will play some chords but they're almost like a challenge. You know, if you can put a melody on this then you're doing well, but quite often that brings out the most interesting stuff."

Adds Pete Trewavas, "I really liked that it featured that kind of Ian Dury/Blockheads *Hit Me With Your Rhythm Stick*-style bass line; it was a bit trippy with those jazzy, trip-hop loops, especially for Marillion. And then these lush chords across it, which gave it this soul, and this great melody line, and suddenly we had this surprise hit."

"It really lifted everyone's morale, having a hit single," says Ian Mosley. "We knew that the album was good and then pre-sale was one of our biggest ever, but there is something about having a hit single again.

"And it wasn't what I suppose you'd call the classic Marillion sound: built up from this drum loop that I played along to. We use that loop live, too, which always makes me laugh, because we were doing it once and the technology wasn't quite keeping up, and it was sounding great, this real swing, and then halfway through the loop just stops, and we instantly just turn into a sort of working men's club band! Great song though." **PW**

PRESS/MARILLION.COM

Money, It's A Gas: Funding Marbles

From album pre-orders to vehicle branding, Marillion's new approach to crowdfunding paid off.

PRESS/MARILLION.COM

Driving success! The *Marbles*-branded cars and, below, the UK ads.

Stickers. That's what it came down to, a few lousy stickers. *Marbles* might have given Marillion a Top 10 single, but the album itself would never worry the Official UK Charts due to accidentally breaking eligibility rules.

"We didn't know," says Mark Kelly with a shrug. "We had a couple of stickers included with the album, and it then wasn't eligible for the chart. I think it shifted enough copies to go Top 30, too, but at least we got a hit single out of it."

"Yeah, you put some merch in with the record and then suddenly that stops you from being in the charts," Ian Mosley says, equally nonplussed about the oversight. "It was one of the biggest pre-orders that we'd ever done, as well. Morale was high, and once machinery started kicking in with it all with the promotion and a lot of pretty good reviews, we were off to the races. And we had things like cars that had been wrapped with the album cover. It blew my mind; I remember being somewhere and this little Smart car went past, and it was completely covered in the *Marbles* face. That was down to the fans and Lucy [Jordache]. You're dead inside if something like that doesn't make you smile."

"I don't know how we were money-wise, but I think we were OK financially; it didn't feel desperate, as it had at some points in our career," says Mark Kelly, one of the architects of the crowdfunding campaign that financed *Anoraknophobia*, which not only changed the band's fortune, but the face of the music industry. It might have worked for album number 12, but for record 13, the band had something else in mind.

"We were thinking, 'OK, let's do another pre-order,'" says Kelly. "At this point, we'd written a bunch of songs, more than we needed, songs that would appear elsewhere later, like *Circular Ride*, *Say The Word*, *Real Tears For Sale*; *Power* came out of those sessions and wouldn't see the light of day until *Sounds That Can't Be Made*, and they were all in the running for *Marbles*. But then we had late bloomers like *The Invisible Man*, which we knew needed to be on the record. So we knew early on that it was going to be a double album, or at least an album with an extra disc for those who pre-ordered it. And you also got your name in the booklet if you did, which we'd done with *Anoraknophobia*, but this all felt a bit more organised."

PRESS/MARILLION.COM

One thing they wouldn't do was offer EMI/Liberty the option of a marketing and distribution deal, as they had done with their previous album.

"They did such a shit job," says Kelly, "I don't know why I was surprised. We went back to them and said, 'OK, we'd like you to put this album out, but we don't want an advance, we just want a decent royalty rate.' So, they basically had no skin in the game at all and did no promotion. It was like free money for them, but it taught us a lesson that you can't rely on the record label to do anything. We spent a lot of the money from the pre-order on marketing. We hired a plugger and stuff like that to try to make sure it did something. And ultimately, by taking matters into our own hands again, it did." **PW**

"I've got to this point now," says Hogarth, "where we're about to make a new album, and I feel like I'm under a certain amount of pressure to come up with something super-deep, because not to would feel like a cop-out and feel two-dimensional to me. I've kind of backed myself into this corner.

"I wrote a song about it that we never used on the last album. I don't know if it'll ever appear, but it's about going mining, you know? As Matt Johnson and The The called their album *Soul Mining*; it's about going within yourself. I think it was what *When I Meet God* [from *Anoraknophobia*] was about: going down into your own mine, and having to go down deeper because you've exhausted the seam. And so, with each subsequent album, it feels like having to dig a deeper shaft to try and find whatever is left because what you had last time is gone now, it's been mined."

And yet you have to keep searching inside of yourself, giving pieces of yourself away.

"Yeah, absolutely. That's certainly true of *The Invisible Man* and *Fantastic Place*; they don't wear me out as much as they did, these things fade away with time and where they came from fades away a little bit, too. I remember when we were touring *Brave*, and about halfway through that tour I just found myself in a corner one day weeping and I didn't know why. But revisiting those themes and things every night wears on you. Then to find yourself in a family unit is really difficult because of this constant feeling that it's a distraction, and it's going to compromise what you do as an artist. So, I struggled with that, particularly when I was younger, and that's what a song like *White Paper* [from *FEAR*] is about: building the nest, the family, and the person who stands there, watches it happen from the wings. There are elements of that in *The Invisible Man*, too. I'm not good at this, and I don't know how to do it. And I feel guilty because it ought to be making me blissfully comfortable and happy. And it's the reverse. And I always struggled with that in both my marriages, you know, two children from my first marriage and a child from a second.

"People sometimes ask me, 'What do you think is the best song you guys ever wrote together?' And although it's so hard, I do tend to land on *The Invisible Man*. I think that was such a huge statement, a huge journey and so deeply personal to me. But it was also a song where the band, and Dave, managed to come up with something musically that was so perfectly in phase with the words, everything I was saying, the music was saying, too. If you can do that, and it's not

Eyes behind the steering wheel: Pete Trewavas.

"Some albums are key moments in our musical journey, and I think *Marbles* is definitely one. I think *Anoraknophobia* might have been one, too."

Pete Trewavas

Ian Mosley: eye can't believe we've done it!

"I have to admit that if H is having a rough time or is in a bad place, then we're usually in for a good album!"

Ian Mosley

easy, it gives it this potency that is irresistible."

The Invisible Man and *Neverland* both featured at Marillion's show at London's Roundhouse last November, and *Fantastic Place* is never too far from the band's setlist wherever they play. When any of the three are introduced live it's rare that an audience member even thinks to exit the room. However, for his part, Steve Rothery admits that he "struggled a little bit" with *Fantastic Place*.

"I just found the chorus a little bit too sweet," he says, "but it's a great song when played live. It was just one of those things for me."

What they can all agree on, though, is the elusive magic that is *Neverland*, and the frustratingly long gestation period it took to bring it to life, not unlike the *Marbles* album itself. After Mark Kelly had introduced the song's distinctive intro to the band, they were only more determined to make it work.

"I remember going into the studio there and Mark going over and over the chords to *Neverland*, but we couldn't find anything to go with it just took forever," says Mosley. "But it really did take forever. Sometimes we'd spend a week in the studio and nothing would materialise. I don't know why it was, and I don't know whether everybody was so insistent on making sure that every chord they played was something unusual or had to fit, I get it, but from a drummer's point of view and probably from a vocalist's point of view, it's very frustrating."

It would be Hogarth who'd eventually break the deadlock on one of the band's most iconic songs.

"We brought it back to the Racket Club with Dave," he remembers. "We knew it was fabulous, but we didn't know where to take it and then out of the blue, something really mundane, you know, just a B flat or some other little moment, something to give it space. That part where I sing, *'Any fool can see…'*, that sort of unlocked it and gave it a little oasis to sit in before the amazing chords happened again.

"And then I threw in '*In the kitchen/ With your dreams*' part and the '*tok, tok, tok*', and as many references to *Peter Pan* as I could, just devilment really. And then talking back to my own echo, because I didn't think anyone had ever done that, you know, the '*When, when, when [Wendy]…*', which has become such a big part of it live. It's taken on a life of its own."

"I knew that I was speaking to you today," says Mosley, "so I went back and listened to the album this morning. Not an ounce of fat on it. Though it did remind me that we once went out as support for Deep Purple and opened each night with *The Invisible Man* and their audience didn't throw anything, so they either could spot the quality of the song, or they hadn't come in from the bar yet. But you think that we had a song like that on there, and then something like *Fantastic Place*, which is always a pleasure to play. And I've always said from a drummer's point of view that the songs that play themselves are usually born of a really good arrangement and *Fantastic Place* is one of those. It's just a dream of a song."

"I had it on about half an hour ago," Hogarth says when *Prog* asks when he last listened to *Marbles*. "As you said, not really a duffer on there. And it brought back a lot of memories. I can't remember much about the tour, but that's usually a good thing: that means very little went wrong. It did remind me how much I like playing songs like *The Damage* though. It's great, because I just slap a guitar on and I'm playing big open chords and, you know, singing things like '*You're a natural woman!*' which is pretty rock'n'roll for us, or at least my spin on it. I feel like a rock star when we go crashing into *The Damage*."

"It's a great moment in our history. We had a great couple of years after *Marbles* and then, in usual Marillion style, we got a little bit lost after that," says Mark Kelly. "*Somewhere Else* is good, but I think Mike [Hunter] was trying to be a bit more adventurous, just going for something a bit more modern-sounding, and I don't think it suited us. Then we made a double album that should have been a single album [*Happiness Is The Road*], and then that whole period where we went to Portugal to work and fell out with H."

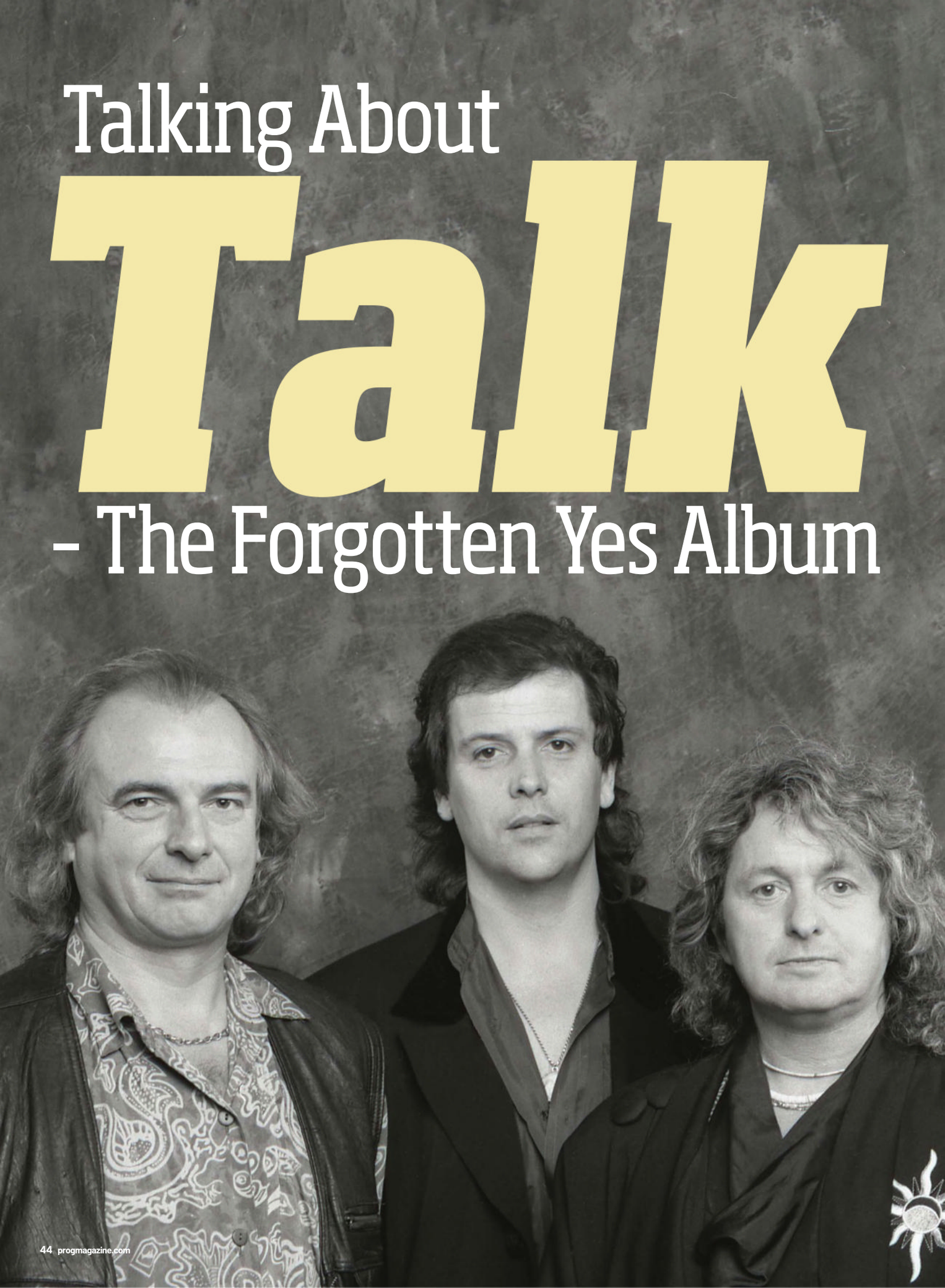
There's a pause.

"Thank God *Marbles* was such a good record, or the next four or five years might have finished us off. And I don't think it was until *Sounds That Can't Be Made* that we found ourselves again, sound-wise or otherwise. But I think that arc, that later-stage Marillion, whatever you want to call it, started with *Marbles*. It set us off on that journey."

Playing *Marbles* at London's Astoria.

An Hour Before It's Dark: Live In Port Zélande 2023 is out now via earMUSIC. See www.marillion.com for more.

Talking About Talk – The Forgotten Yes Album



With the long-awaited 30th anniversary reissue now available, **Yes**'s final album featuring Trevor Rabin and Tony Kaye is well overdue for re-evaluation. This is the story of *Talk*, the band's innovative and relatively unsung masterpiece, and the tour that followed its original release in 1994.

Words: Stephen Lambe **Portrait:** Robert Knight Archive/Redferns/Getty Images

Yes's hugely successful Union tour ended in spring 1992. This left the band – not for the first time – at a crossroads. In truth, there was never much likelihood of the eight-piece Yes continuing, but salvation came in the form of long-term supporter Phil Carson, who now ran a new label, Victory, for Japanese conglomerate JVC and badly wanted Yes on his roster. He knew what version of the band he wanted, and Trevor Rabin was given a mission.

"Phil asked me if I'd take the responsibility for a new Yes album with the *90125* line-up giving us pretty much free rein to do what we wanted," Rabin remembers.

The guitarist also had a plan for recording.

"I've always been technically minded and I'd been following the development of digital technology very closely. When I saw that there was a possibility to record in a non-linear way, I realised this was the future, so I went for it."

It seems that the band line-up was not quite settled, with Rick Wakeman in the frame to be included. Although, given that neither Rabin nor keyboard player Tony Kaye remember any direct discussions with Wakeman, this was clearly managerial manoeuvring. Indeed, when Wakeman was asked to sever relations with his current management, he declined.

"Phil [Carson] asked me if I'd take the responsibility for a new Yes album with the *90125* line-up giving us pretty much free rein to do what we wanted."
Trevor Rabin

Rabin had been writing material for some time, including a lengthy period working with Supertramp vocalist Roger Hodgson.

"Roger lived in Sacramento, in northern California, so I'd drive up, and we'd write together. At one point, Chris [Squire] and Alan [White] came along, and we jammed in his studio for a while. We wrote a few things together, one of which was *Walls*. But there was never the intention that Roger was going to be the singer in Yes, in fact, when Jerry Moss at A&M realised that we were writing together, he tried to put together a new version of Supertramp with me in the band! I said no – and Roger wasn't into it either."

Rabin realised that the key to a successful project was involving Jon Anderson at a much earlier stage than with *90125* and *Big*

Alan White, Trevor Rabin, Jon Anderson, Chris Squire and Tony Kaye at Rock Walk Of Fame, 1994.

Generator, so the two musicians rented space in a beachside motel in California to get to know each other and work on material. Anderson remembers that time fondly.

"We'd talk about music all day long and then get on with some recordings," the singer recalls. "Slowly but surely, the songs started opening up. I was excited to work one-on-one. Trevor could lay down drums, bass, and guitar, and I'd scribble down some lyrics. It was a very harmonious experience for me."

Rabin also recognises the importance of that pre-production period: "We wrote some good things, not all of which ended up on the album."

The band — comprising Rabin, Anderson, Chris Squire, Tony Kaye and Alan White — entered Rabin's Jacaranda studio in his converted garage, although the drums were recorded at A&M Studios in Hollywood. Most of the chosen material had been written by Rabin and Anderson with contributions from Squire, who wrote the riff that carries the powerful and brooding *Real Love*. However, the technical side remained a challenge, as Rabin remembers.

RON GALELLA, LTD./RON GALELLA COLLECTION VIA GETTY IMAGES

TIM MOSENFELDER/GETTY IMAGES

Letting the music do the talking: Trevor Rabin and Chris Squire at Shoreline Amphitheatre, Mountain View, California on July 15, 1994.

"We had to find a way of syncing four Apple Macintoshes, as they could only give us four channels each. I also used a 24-track analogue machine just to get some warmth into the sound. But the technical side was very intense, and we had scientists from the software company rewriting code in the studio at times, so that part was quite traumatic… but also amazing."

Not that this affected Anderson's enjoyment of the recording process, with the vocalist appreciating the simplicity of the set-up while he lived in Rabin's home.

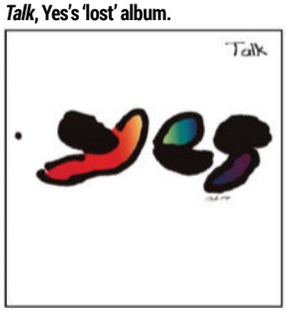
"You wake up, you have breakfast, you go to work. There's no messing around. You're there and you try things out."

Despite his relatively modest contributions to the album — he's credited only with Hammond organ — the one musician that supported Rabin most during the recording process was Tony Kaye.

The keyboardist remembers, "The band were very dissipated and weren't there much, but I lived very close to Trevor, so I was at his studio every day. It had been left up to him to pull the album together and the technical side was crazy. I remember spending a lot of time smoking and drinking beer, waiting for things to happen, but it was exciting watching the more involved tracks build up."

The one song that seems to have captured the imagination of many fans is the 16-minute *Endless Dream*. This was created by Rabin, who remembers playing it to Anderson for the first time.

***Talk*, Yes's 'lost' album.**



"I put it down with my vocal on it, from start to finish. I played it to him and Damion, his son, and when I looked up, they were both crying — which was either a huge compliment or a disaster [Laughs]. The words were based around the mess that this world had become, so Jon sensitively enhanced the lyrics around that theme."

But is *Talk* a real Yes album, or is it no more than a glorified Rabin solo album? In some ways, it's a bit of both. It's not hard to track the lineage between Rabin's 1989 record, *Can't Look Away*, and his 2023 comeback, *Rio*. The factor that links all three recordings is the sheer breadth and character of Rabin's guitar textures, which is something he acknowledges.

"My writing process wasn't so different to what I did with *Rio*. In particular, orchestration and arrangement have always been very important. I always try to bring that to the guitar, so *Talk* led to *Rio* in that way."

From the acoustic pyrotechnics of *Where Will You Be* to the trumpet-like fanfares of *State Of Play* and even the country twang of *Walls*, *Talk* offers arguably the most varied guitar textures on any Yes album.

Yet, in other respects, it's very much Yes. Anderson's contributions are vital, and although, as with *90125* and *Big Generator*, Rabin still takes the occasional lead vocal, Anderson has rarely sounded better.

"It's a very precise album, sound-wise," affirms the vocalist.

While Squire's swooping bass lines are all present and correct, especially on *Walls*; on first listen, his distinctive vocals seem absent, given the layered nature of the backing vocals. But, as Rabin says, "If you take Chris out of the vocal mix, you have a different beast. He was an essential part, and even massed vocals would sound very odd without him; his voice was so strong."

Tony Kaye, Chris Squire, Trevor Rabin, Alan White and Jon Anderson at Yes's Rock Walk Induction Party at Hollywood's Guitar Center, on May 24, 1994.

TIM MOSENFELDER/GETTY IMAGES

Jon Anderson has fond memories of the *Talk* era of the band.

As for Alan White's drums, Rabin admits, "I wanted them to sound spiky and big. Some might think it's too much, but it's still clean and doesn't get in the way of the other instrumentation."

On its first release, the album sold poorly, with modest chart showings on both sides of the Atlantic. So, by the time the band went on tour — which took in North and South America and Japan only — they knew that they had their work cut out, particularly as they were due to play almost the whole album. But that didn't dampen their enthusiasm for the tour.

"The band was in a very good mode at that point," Rabin recalls. "It's the best we ever played."

However, on learning that the reissue of *Talk* contains a recording of only the second show, in Canandaigua, New York, Rabin sounds slightly apprehensive.

"In all the years touring with Yes, we never played through the entire show at rehearsals. It drove me nuts! Tony was always well-prepared, but the first few shows were usually more of a rehearsal."

However, the recording shows that even early on that tour, the band were in fine fettle. It includes several quirks not seen on Yes tours since, with Rabin playing piano at a couple of points in the show.

"I had an idea of how to introduce *And You And I* in a way that was keyboard-based," he recalls.

Indeed, his introduction includes a snatch of *Catherine Parr* from Wakeman's *Six Wives Of Henry VIII*, a deliberate and affectionate homage. Again, the relatively unsung Kaye comes in for huge praise from Rabin on *Endless Dream*.

"Tony was such a team player. I played the intro as I had on the record, and then Tony looped it while I switched to guitar. Tony was always so supportive, and I'd never have played the piano part if Tony had had a problem. He had a helluva job on that song, but looping my piano part made that easier."

There was a sixth musician onstage too, as Rabin remembers.

"Chris had gone through some medical issues, so to get insurance, we had to have someone in the wings. Billy Sherwood learned the show, but during rehearsals, we realised that there were parts he could cover, so he did some guitar and keyboards and helped with the vocals. He's a good producer, so he had a good sense of what we needed."

"It was my first tour," Sherwood says, "not just with Yes but with anyone."

He still sounds relieved that he never had to step into Squire's hefty shoes.

"I had the set down," the bassist remembers, "but I'm so happy I never had to employ it."

However, Sherwood was still an important part of the show, as the live recordings demonstrate, with his higher-register vocals prominent throughout, especially on an extended *Changes* and *I Am Waiting* where he doubles Rabin's brief lead vocal. He also got his moment in the spotlight when he and Squire played bass together at the start of *Endless Dream*.

"Chris said, 'You come out front' — I had a little station behind Alan for most of the show — 'and I'll play an octave above you. We'll make the sound of an eight-string bass together.' He wouldn't take no for an answer!"

Despite Yes continuing to perform well, as the tour reached its conclusion, changes were afoot. Shortly after *Talk*'s release, Victory Music went bankrupt, scuppering any serious promotion for the album, and, by early 1995, both Rabin and Kaye had quit the band.

"Things started to get a little dark," Kaye remembers. "I was pretty fed up with touring and I felt it was the end of the road."

Rabin concurs. "After the tour I felt I was persona non grata. I took responsibility for the commercial failure of *Talk*, and I had to live with it. But it spurred on my move into film music."

As for Anderson, Squire and White, they didn't stay quiet for long. A new record deal with Castle Communications subsidiary label Essential Records reunited the remaining trio with Rick Wakeman and Steve Howe and, by the end of 1995, work had begun on what would become *Keys To Ascension*. Although Yes would continue to undergo further line-up changes over the years, many fans still regard *Talk* as something of a 'lost album'. Despite a 2002 reissue on Eagle Records, it's been unavailable for some time, so this 30th-anniversary reissue provides a timely opportunity for re-evaluation.

"I think it's been slightly underestimated," admits Tony Kaye. "There's a lot of good things on it: a lot of good playing. But I think it was unfortunate that it was a bit of a mixed bag, so a lot of the old-school Yes fans ignored it. But it's Trevor's album, there's no doubt about it."

"We'd talk about music all day long and then get on with some recordings. Slowly but surely, the songs started opening up. I was excited to work one-on-one. It was a very harmonious experience for me."
Jon Anderson

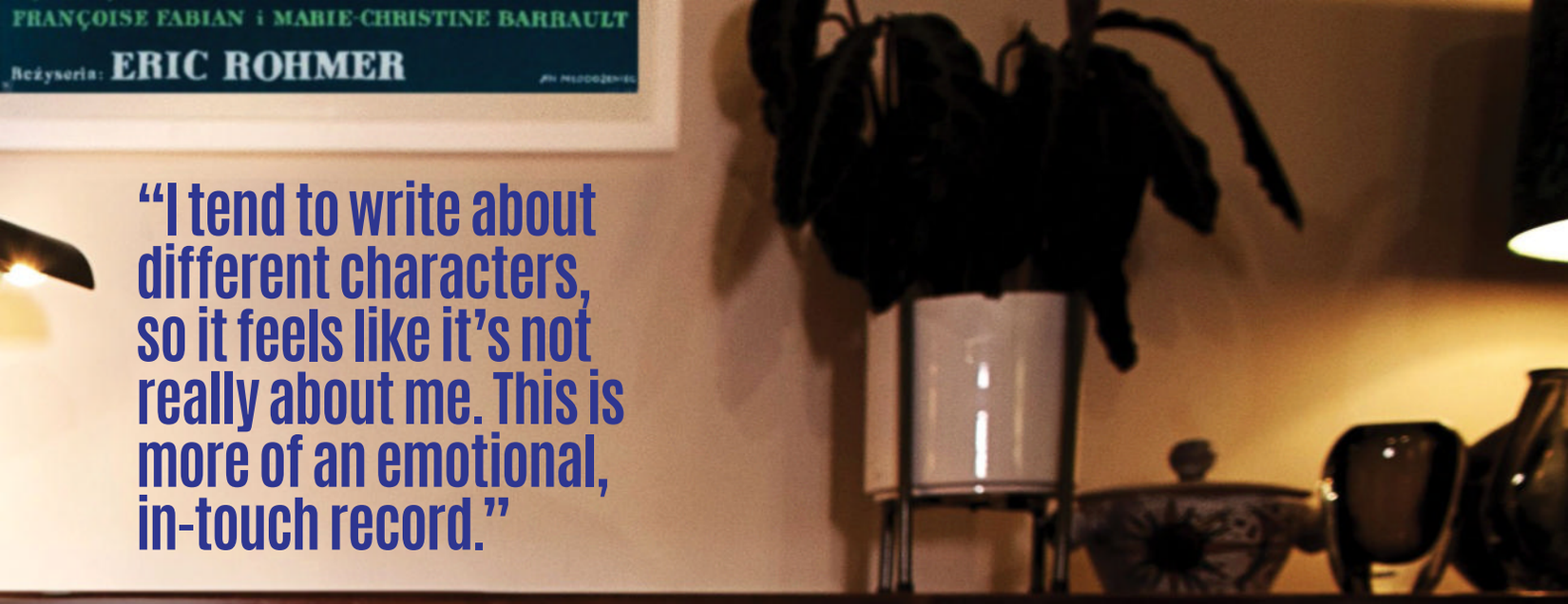
Talk (30th Anniversary Edition) is out now via Spirit Of Unicorn Music. See www.yesworld.com for more information.

Jane Weaver: in a genre of her own.

Heavy Mellow

Never one to follow trends, **Jane Weaver** has mixed things up on her dreamy new album, *Love In Constant Spectacle*. She's taken a modern approach to the cut-up technique of lyric-writing and even travelled to Rockfield to record with a producer for the very first time. She reflects on the experience, talks touring plans, and explains why simpler can sometimes be better.

Words: Julian Marszalek **Images:** Nic Chapman



"I tend to write about different characters, so it feels like it's not really about me. This is more of an emotional, in-touch record."

Those lesser talents who hitched their horses to the psychedelic bandwagon of the last decade might be feeling the strain after just a few releases, but Jane Weaver is showing absolutely no signs of losing any interest in her art. Indeed, she's now reached the point where her music is instantly recognisable thanks to an ever-evolving solo career that stretches back to the start of the millennium. Her fusion of hauntology via vintage analogue synths, with a love of pop's melodicism at its most insistent and the more psychedelic end of krautrock, all garnished with mysticism and the occult, has ensured a steady of stream of releases that could be by no one else but Jane Weaver. Hell's teeth, she could be a genre of her own.

And, while it would be easy for Weaver to stay in the comfort zone of her Mancunian base and immediate creative circle, complacency hasn't been an option. Looking back at her more immediate trail of releases, forward has been the only way to go in the composition and creation of her latest album, *Love In Constant Spectacle*.

"I wanted to do something a little bit different," she tells *Prog* as she considers her more recent trajectory. "I think with this record, for instance, it's not particularly conceptual, like some of the other albums. *The Silver Globe* was conceptual and *Modern Kosmology* was inspired by [pioneering Swedish abstract artist] Hilma af Klint. *The Fallen By Watch Bird* [in 2010] was when I started getting more experimental and started exploring Germanic fairy tales and folklore and stuff like that. *Flock* was a bit more immediate, because it was a collection of pop songs that were back to back. For this one, it's a little bit more heavy, mellow and downbeat. And a little bit more honest, maybe."

She's not wrong. *Love In Constant Spectacle* is a beautifully layered album that reveals more of itself with each subsequent listen. What becomes immediately apparent as the pumping synths usher in opener *Perfect Storm* is that Weaver is moving at a more considered pace and that there's a story to be told. *'Don't blame me/It's the universe that's wrong,'* she laments with no little chutzpah on the delicate *Univers,* before giving way to a shimmering coda that tugs at the heartstrings, as elsewhere, in the spacious surroundings of the title track where her voice trades moves with punctuating instrumentation, she sighs, *'I won't hear when you call me.'*

"I guess it's more personal, but I didn't want to do something directly personal," she reasons. "I tend to write about different characters, so it feels like it's not really about me. This is more of an emotional, in-touch record."

By her own admission, this approach to writing the material for *Love In Constant Spectacle* is a defence mechanism that's at odds with the prevailing 21st-century mode for confessional and revealing posts that are continually uploaded on any number of social media platforms.

"Everybody's exposing their lives online and discussing everything about themselves," says Weaver with a wide-eyed incredulity. "I don't particularly feel comfortable doing that."

Her solution to this particular conundrum has been two-fold. From a lyrical standpoint, she's employed a new approach to her writing that's seen her using not only the cut-up lyric technique that was pioneered by the multidisciplinary artist Brion Gysin and beat author William S Burroughs, and used to stunning effect by David Bowie in his 70s heyday, but also by harnessing the random effects of sending phrases backwards and forwards through Google Translate.

"I think I actually wrote more words for this record than ever, and came away with more simpler terms for everything," she says, smiling at the memory of her new approach to tackling lyrics.

She continues, "It's funny, because I didn't want to do something too wrapped up in so many concepts and metaphors. I just wanted to do something that was quite simple, and come away with something that was quite easily translated. I was doing a lot of cut and paste stuff, that kind of mixing stuff around to make it sound different and then re-translating in different languages and coming away with different things.

"It's weird because doing that took a lot longer to come up with something that was a lot simpler. It really kind of reduced what I was trying to say, but then I did want it to be more like little vignettes from films where you have a little meme and subtitles underneath."

And how does she view the results?

"Sometimes the poetry is really beautiful," she ventures, "and sometimes when you say something in English, and then you flick it to, like, something Eastern European and then back again, you think, 'My God, it sounds much better!'"

As for the album's sonic approach, Weaver felt it best to bring in outside assistance to challenge and aid her while ceding a degree of the creative decision making and so, fulfilling a long-standing ambition, she approached and secured the services of in-demand producer John Parish. Arguably best known for his work with PJ Harvey, his much-sought-out skills meant that his time was at a premium. Understanding the ramifications of a limited work time, Weaver recognised that she would only get out of the partnership what she put in.

"Normally I produce stuff and I go to a studio around the corner from my house over a period of two or three years, but this was entirely different production-wise, because there was a lot of pre-preparing to do in order to go in the studio," recalls Weaver.

With just two weeks booked in the bucolic environs of the storied Rockfield Studios in Monmouthshire and a further five days marked for mixing at Bristol's Invada Studios, Weaver admits that she found the looming deadlines, coupled with John Parish

***Love In Constant Spectacle* is out now.**

"Everybody's exposing their lives online and discussing everything about themselves. I don't particularly feel comfortable doing that."

ensuring that they were met, to be productive rather than pressured.

"I never finish my words until the very last minute because I want to hear what the music's like first," she says. "On top of that, I'm going into the studio with, like, 1,000 sheets of paper, and then knowing that we've only got so many weeks in Rockfield and then so many wherever else... I don't normally work like that. I'm normally more laissez-faire, so having to get all that together was quite hard.

"And then John would say, 'Have you finished the lyrics to this one?' I'd be like, 'Nearly! I've just done the lyrics, but I just need to put them in order!' I don't like to commit myself until the very last minute. I'm always like that, but it was different having a deadline."

For all the pressure experienced by Weaver and her band of guitarist Joel Nicholson, bassist Matt Grayson and drummer Andrew Cheetham, she's still full of praise about Parish.

"That's the thing about working with John — he's very experienced as a musician, as a writer and as a producer. So it's, like, I needed somebody who I could look up to and just go, 'I trust that person's decision,' you know?

Jane Weaver tried different ways of working for her new album, and they paid off handsomely.

I guess he's more simplified with everything. He'd say, 'That sounds a bit pub-rock, that' and I'd go, 'Really?' And then you'd just simplify everything."

Working within a framework of time restraints has certainly left its mark on Jane Weaver.

"My biggest takeaway is that it's just a different way of working," she reasons. "There are certain things I like about working like that, because it's very disciplined. It's good to experience going into such a great studio like Rockfield, but I couldn't afford to go in there for, like, three months. Working with John is just really good... for somebody to run the session in a very organised way, rather than me running the session and using the studio as a tool to do a lot of collage work. It was just really nice that somebody else was making the decisions."

Coupled with themes of mortality and fragility, the overall effect and mood of *Love In Constant Spectacle* is what Weaver categorises as "heavy mellow" — a dichotomy that finds the intent of serious subject matter blended with an aural balm.

"Quite a lot of people passed away recently, maybe over the last four years or so," explains Weaver about the inspirations behind some of the album's songs. "Some of the themes are drawn out of people that I knew, who particularly were quite hedonistic, and maybe took things too far. And they weren't necessarily into music or doing music; they were just people that I might have known from back in the day, and when they succumb to illness or alcoholism or drug problems, you just think, 'How did that happen?' Because we're all on the same page and it's just so random, isn't it?"

Some passings have been closer to home, however.

"Unfortunately my dad was quite poorly and died last year," she reveals. "And a lot of people have this, not just with elderly parents, but living alongside something or somebody who's quite poorly. That anticipatory grief thing makes you question how you feel about mortality. And you think, 'Which is best? Being in anticipatory grief or somebody just dropping dead?' You don't know, because they're both horrible things. But I would say anticipatory grief just walks with you all the time. It's something that you can't get away from. That kind of influenced how I was thinking about some stuff; it's more downbeat, more heavy mellow. And that's why I was trying to search for joy in certain pockets of places."

It's that quest for joy that drives Jane Weaver onwards. To coincide with the release of *Love In Constant Spectacle* she embarked on a spring tour, her largest to date, which saw her play 18 shows on both sides of the Irish Sea, including Bearded Theory Festival in Burton upon Trent. It was a busy period, but one that she relished, not least as she views performing as a form of artistic self-improvement.

"Touring is really important," she states. "I want to be a better musician, I want to be a better guitarist and I want to be a better keyboard player. I don't get anything out of it if I'm just kind of doing karaoke every night. I'd rather be more involved. I just want to get back to doing that."

A handful of European shows have already been booked for the autumn, so it looks like busy times ahead.

"I'm feeling happy," Weaver says with a smile. "There's so much to do, though: you've got to rehearse, you've got to do your pre-production for live rehearsals, and then [decide] what it'll look like with the visuals and the stage show. So, all that kind of stuff and then actually doing a tour, it's really exciting. It was our first album tour for a while. There's always something to do."

Love In Constant Spectacle is out now via Fire Records. See janeweavermusic.com for more information.

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Droning On...

On his first **Bass Communion** album in 12 years, Steven Wilson pushes the boundaries of progressive music with what could only be described as a experimental noise record. *The Itself Of Itself* finds him taking inspiration from avant-garde composers and experimenting with studio sounds. *Prog* discovers how tape hiss and Stockhausen led to the creation of one of the artist's most surprising releases.

Words: Jerry Ewing **Images:** Hajo Müller

"Even by Bass Communion standards this is a pretty confrontational record."

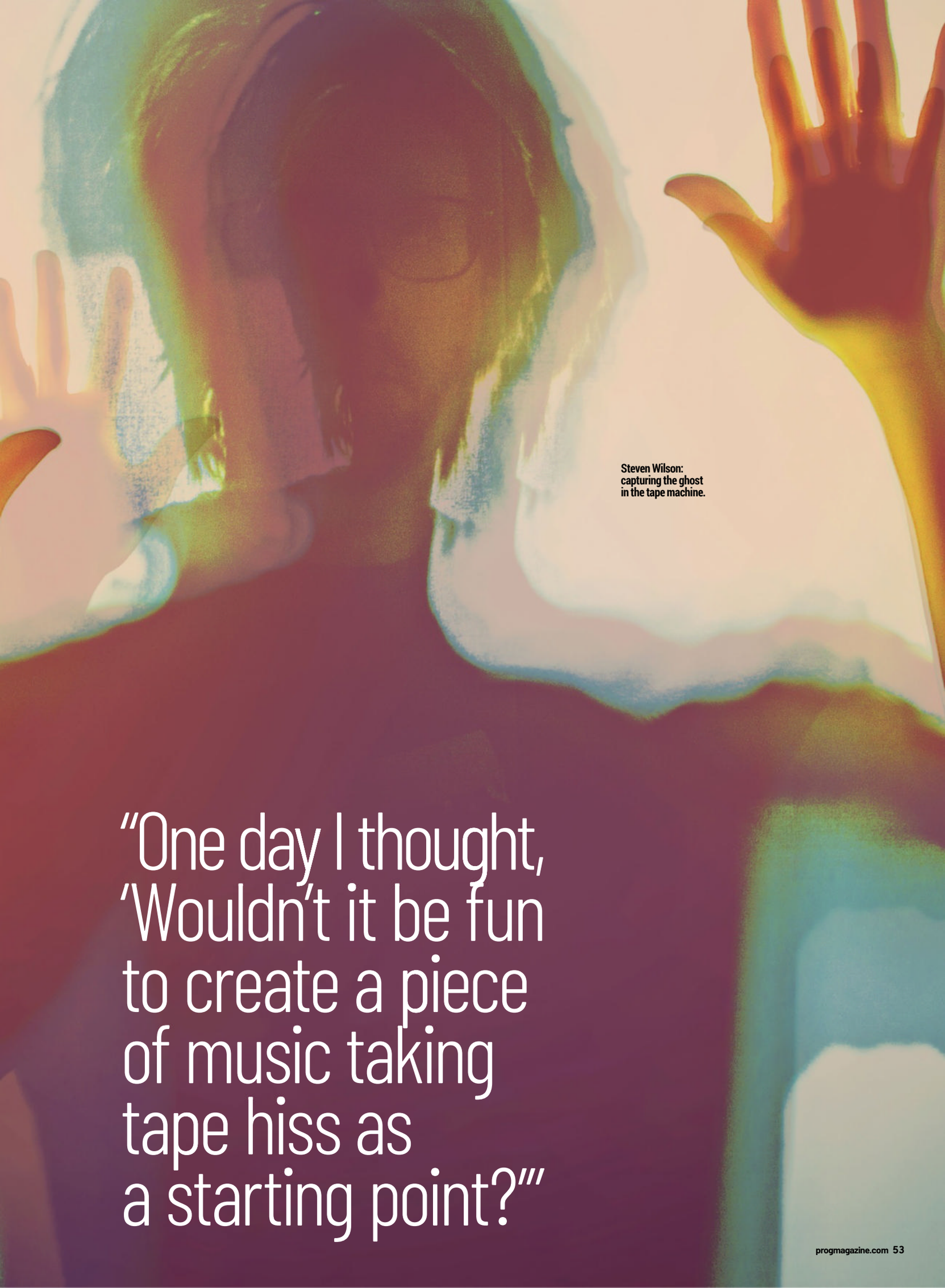
Steven Wilson reclines on a sofa in his north London home, sips his tea and seeks to explain to *Prog* exactly what Bass Communion is. How he makes the sounds that make up this project's latest album, *The Itself Of Itself*. Where the ideas come from. And just what ambient drone noise music is anyway: is it even music at all?

The Itself Of Itself is a sometimes uncomfortable and confrontational record, he's right. But it's also a fascinating noise. Veering into territory more commonly occupied by the likes of Sunn O))) and Earth in today's musical sphere, and previously by Robert Fripp and Brian Eno back in the 70s, *The Raven That Refused To Sing...* or *The Future Bites*, this is not.

"That's why it's called *The Itself Of Itself*. Because it is what it is," he says, matter-of-factly. "It's unapologetically what it is."

In some ways, it's unlike any Bass Communion album you'll have heard. Unlike 2011's *Cenotaph*, whose four titular movements contained a sonic thread, that central throbbing hum, onto which the listener could grab hold to follow where the sound went, *The Itself Of Itself*'s seven tracks veer wildly from the self-explanatory *A Study For Tape Hiss And Other Studio Artefacts* through the exploration of radio static in *Blackmail* to the almost — and we stress, *almost* — calming ambience of *Apparition 3*.

It's at once an intriguing listen and a wholly disturbing one, as well. There are times, not least in the title track and the 13-minute *Bruise*, where the listener is drawn in with the initial soundscape, only to find themself



Steven Wilson: capturing the ghost in the tape machine.

"One day I thought, 'Wouldn't it be fun to create a piece of music taking tape hiss as a starting point?'"

"I think a lot of it also comes from the second record of *Ummagumma*. Being a Floyd fan early on and hearing that record when I was maybe 11 or 12 blew my mind."

almost repulsed by a starkly corrosive climax. On the title track the very aural structure dissolves, despairingly, while the journey *Bruise* takes you on ends in a squall of disquieting crackle. In his review in *Prog* 150, Jeremy Allen suggested the best way to listen to the album was "in a spare hour where nothing is happening". Perhaps leave the light on, too.

"I'd love to tell you that it's all come from nowhere, but it hasn't," Wilson reflects. "I would go down to my local library, back in the days when libraries had records, and take out records by people like [German composer and the father of electronic music] Karlheinz Stockhausen and [Italian composer noted for his experimentation with electronics] Luciano Berio. Serious classical stuff. A lot of that music starts from the premise of an idea, a concept.

"One of Stockhausen's things was a piece from the mid-60s called *Hymnen*, where he took recordings of all the national anthems around the world and made a piece of music by processing them. I've always liked conceptual things like that. Another piece he had was called *Carré*, where he had an orchestra in each corner of the auditorium and he would pass sound. Surround sound, in the 1950s. Amazing!

"So, I was always fascinated with great conceptualists like that. And there was also a fascination where you take an idea as a starting point for music. Not a melody, not a rhythm, not a harmony: an idea. For a long time I've been really in love with the idea of audio artefacts that act as sound. Tape hiss, warble, saturation, dropouts. And one of my favourite digital plug-ins is one that emulates cassette anomalies. You can choose the brand of tape, how many times it's been taped over, the age of the tape, dropouts, whatever. And I like it because it gives character to things that are a bit clinical otherwise. And I got to the point where I found I was enjoying adding things like tape hiss and warble to sounds just to give them character. One day I thought, 'Wouldn't it be fun to create a piece of music taking tape hiss as a starting point?' Because tape hiss has lots of different varieties. An old cassette, a new cassette, a metal cassette, an analogue tape. Wouldn't it be interesting to try to create something? It's very much in the tradition of experimental avant-garde conceptual art. Think of it in the same way as Rothko painting just using one colour. You deliberately restrict yourself to a very small palette of sound to create some music out of."

In searching for a link between what many *Prog* readers listen to and something that might sound like something a lab technician has created, we were drawn back to hearing Tangerine Dream's fourth album, 1973's *Atem*, for the first time. Well-versed in the more melodic soundscapes of later 70s albums such as *Phaedra*, *Rubycon* and *Stratosfear*, the band's earlier, more exploratory sound was a harsh listen.

"One of my favourite albums of all time, *Atem*," Wilson says with a smile.

"I think that a thing that a lot of people who listen to rock music have a problem with is that if you take away melody, rhythm and harmony, they'll say that isn't music at all. And yet, if you sit down to watch a horror movie, very often your emotional response to the movie is being… you're processing the visuals you see also hearing these drones and it gives you this feeling of dread in the pit of your stomach. Even people who don't recognise that kind of thing as music in a recreational sense do have an emotional response to pure texture.

"A lot of the appeal of Tangerine Dream was to do with texture and sound on those early records. They turned into something more layered and more progressive. Edgar [Froese] started playing guitar so there's more recognisable timbres and sounds. But you go back to the beginning and you're like, 'What the hell is that?!'"

Tangerine Dream were, of course, a collective, and, although they took a more ambient approach later, they were far removed from the music Wilson creates with Bass Communion. How, though, does he actually set about creating what ends up on BC albums? Is it a case of just walking around, hearing something, and thinking 'That's interesting, I wonder what I can do with that'?

"Pretty much," he says with a nod.

"There's one track on the album [the title track], which is this piece I played on the Mellotron. It was quite nice but I thought it's not interesting enough. I spent a long time trying to twist it into something more engaging. I was adding more and more layers of grime and dirt and lo-fi until it sounded like something, to me, fascinating, eerie, creaky, and a bit spooky. Sometimes I think it's a question of taking something and trying to make it sound more unique, more engaging."

Does he actively sit down and focus on writing for a Bass Communion record?

"I think, because it's such a different approach, I know when I'm writing for Bass Communion," he says. "But that doesn't mean that there isn't a sense of this cross-fertilisation going on. Because in some sense, Bass Communion also becomes R&D [research and development] for the rock albums, sound treatments, textures, and a lot of stuff. And it *is* a lot of stuff: there are elements of things that I've created in Bass Communion that I've retold in the rock albums. There's a lot of discoveries that go on. 'Oh, I can do that with that sound' and 'That's an interesting sound.' So there is definitely a crossover."

As Wilson and *Prog* confer over sound and music, Wilson's wife Rotem is hard at work in the adjoining kitchen, preparing for one of their daughter's birthdays the following day. She graciously allows us to sample the odd sweet treat destined for the party, which causes the family dogs, Bowie and Lenny, to sit expectantly at our feet, eyes longingly fixed on the pastries. Given their close proximity to both Wilson's studio and music room, which houses his formidable record collection, what, *Prog* wonders, do his daughters make of Bass Communion?

"The girls have heard a lot of music that would be in that tradition," Wilson states. "Our eldest listens to stuff like Japanese noise music. She loves low frequency oscillation and electronic stuff. While they don't necessarily like it or listen to it by choice, I think when they grow up, it's not going to be something that they're going to listen to and say, 'That's crap, that's not music at all.' At least they're going to understand that it has some value as art."

"There's the trend of listening to the texture of sound on TikTok," Rotem interjects. "It could be a chewing sound or whispering. They listen to textures. It's massive."

"Oh yeah, ASMR. Have you heard of that?" Wilson asks.

There's nothing wrong with a bit of self-indulgence when it comes to music!

ASMR, or autonomous sensory meridian response, is the term used to describe the relaxing sensation some people feel as a result of listening to certain sounds. In recent years there's been a large increase in the amount of online content containing ASMR 'trigger' sounds that are intended to promote relaxation.

"It's basically YouTube videos with the sound of rustling paper or chewing; all these videos online that are supposed to relax you and create less anxiety. And apparently, it really does work. I can't do it," he exclaims, looking at *Prog* aghast. "It's like hell to me."

So which of Dad's music is their favourite?

"Steven's solo stuff," Rotem replies. "The thing is because they grew up in this kind of household they're so much more exposed to sounds of real guitars and real drums. So they really like the rocky bits. They like the dark rock'n'roll. They also love Taylor Swift and Billie Eilish. But if they would choose I think they would go with the really heavy stuff."

Outside of his immediate family, Wilson isn't entirely certain who the Bass Communion audience really is.

"This is partly true of everything I've ever done," he ponders. "I do it in a very indulgent, selfish way. But it's also true to say that Bass Communion itself has moved further and further away from melodic sounds. The earlier sounds were more meditative records. You could put it on in the background. There's stuff on this record that's quite ugly for the sake of being ugly and quite noisy for the sake of being noisy. I don't really know. I find myself almost talking people out of it."

Wilson's not lying. *Prog*'s initial request to interview him about the Bass Communion record was met with an email that read: "You really want to talk to me about this project for *Prog*? Just checking as the new album is basically pretty much noise."

"That's the Trojan Horse thing," he states. "If it wasn't me doing this music, you probably wouldn't give it a second glance. Or be in a position to hear it.

"It's like you mentioned earlier: you recognise the reference points when you listen to one of my songs. But you're not so sure when you listen to this. In that sense it's truly exploratory music, like the piece about tape hiss. I asked myself how I could make tape hiss into something fascinating and beautiful. And I also wondered if you had to be someone like me — someone who had a nostalgia for that anyway. And if you don't have a nostalgia for cassettes and that sound, maybe it would be completely irrelevant to you. I don't know."

As our interview draws to a close and we say our goodbyes, Wilson pauses, struck by thought.

"Coming back to your earlier question of where does it come from," he says. "I think a lot of it also comes from the second record of *Ummagumma*. Being a Floyd fan early on and hearing that record when I was maybe 11 or 12 blew my mind. I know a lot of Floyd fans find that unlistenable. To me it was magical."

The Itself Of Itself is out now via Lumberton Trading Company/Fourth Dimension Records. See stevenwilsonhq.com for more information.

"There's a spirit in CHINA that really moved me!"

In 2012, drummer Anthony Vanacore made the life-changing choice to migrate from the US to China. The band he started there, **OU**, became the first Chinese prog act to sign with a major western label and have just collaborated with Devin Townsend. Vanacore tells *Prog* about his collective's boundary-breaking journey so far.

Words: Matt Mills **Images:** Zhang Xin

Anthony Vanacore was only supposed to be away for a few weeks. After finishing his studies of music at Queens College, New York, in 2010, the American drummer joined an orchestra for a tour of China. He enjoyed it so much that he did it again the following year. Upon his second return home from the Far East, he realised something: it didn't feel like home any more.

"When I came back – I was in Flushing, Queens – I gained a whole new perspective on where I was living," the musician tells *Prog* over a video call from his current hometown of Beijing. "I became more and more fascinated, and very passionate about learning Chinese. It's hard to describe, but there is a resilience about the people here, and there's a spirit that really moved me."

Twelve years after emigrating, Vanacore hasn't just settled into a new country; he's also a cornerstone of one of that country's premier progressive bands. He co-founded OU (pronounced 'oh') with fellow Beijing-based musicians Jing Zhang (guitars) and Chris Cui (bass) in 2019. After their ranks were rounded out by vocalist Lynn Wu, the collective quickly inked a deal with prog haven InsideOutMusic (home of Dream Theater, Leprous, Caligula's Horse and more), making them the first Chinese prog act to sign with a major western label. Their first album, aptly titled *One*, followed in 2022.

OU's debut was a labyrinthine mixture of jazz, folk and metal. Wu crooned ethereal melodies atop the musicians' dense, polyrhythmic work, anchored around Vanacore's virtuoso playing. The blissful, extended vocal melodies stood in stark contrast to the flurrying instrumentation. It made this quartet one of the few progressive metal prospects to sound truly unique in the genre's modern landscape.

Just 23 months later, OU have returned with full-length follow-up *II: Frailty*, and their distinct sound has found one helluva champion. The album is produced and mixed by

OU are only just getting started!

"Devin Townsend is one of the sweetest guys I've ever met. Really caring, really thoughtful and he just puts his all into it."

prog polymath Devin Townsend, mastermind behind Strapping Young Lad and myriad other projects. Townsend even lends his voice to the single *Purge*, his howls laying down a powerful backdrop to Wu's more delicate singing.

Vanacore says it was being on the same label as Townsend that made the team-up possible.

"Devin is one of the sweetest guys I've ever met," he adds. "Really caring, really thoughtful and he just puts his all into it. I remember, he'd just come off of a tour, he had jet lag and he was sick, but he wanted to jump right in. He was so passionate! I was so appreciative of the fact that, even though this wasn't his own music, he treated it like it was. He put that amount of care into it, which meant the world to me."

As a result, *II: Frailty* bears Townsend's signature 'wall of sound' production style. All of OU's instruments and nuance burst from the speakers throughout this nine-song set, again bridging the gaps between metal, jazz and, via the vocals of Wu, gorgeous Chinese folk. Vanacore has trouble describing the singer's lyrics when *Prog* asks, but he says they relate to such broad themes as Buddhism and existentialism. Musically, though, he describes the new songs as "tighter" than what was heard on *One*.

"There were a few songs on the first album that had the more standard 'verse, chorus, verse, chorus' kind of thing, but a lot of them also had a more open structure," he elaborates. "For the second album, a lot of the songs ended up being more traditional. It wasn't intentional. The songs are more streamlined than the first album."

There's no questioning *II: Frailty*'s progressive credentials, however. Even a cursory listen to the scrambling drums and bass of *Ocean* or *Frailty*'s pop-gone-arrhythmic verses will attest to that. And that's because heavy, forward-thinking music, in Vanacore's own words, "changed my life forever".

Vanacore was born in New York City but, at a very young age, moved with his family about half-an-hour down the road to New Jersey.

"As a kid, I fucked around a lot and wasted tons of time," he remembers. "I wasn't really good at the whole 'school' thing and, you know, homework, but music saved my life. I'm definitely more introverted and always had self-confidence issues, but music gave me a bit of confidence as a kid: 'Wow, I love it and I'm OK at it!'"

Vanacore says the turning point of his life was receiving a copy of Metallica's fourth album, *...And Justice For All* on CD at age of "nine or 10". Widely regarded as the band's most experimental outing, it contained songs such as the winding 10-minute title track and the dynamic, evocative instrumental, *To Live Is To Die*.

OU, L-R: Chris Cui, Anthony Vanacore, Jing Zhang, and Lynn Wu (front).

"[Beijing is] probably the most fertile music scene [in the country]. You have a lot of underground music, a lot of experimental stuff, and everything else: pop, jazz, rock, metal. There are quite a few venues."

"I remember sitting in class in fifth grade and not being able to think of anything except the guitar solo of [opening song] *Blackened*," he continues. "As soon as the school bell rang, I ran home and sat my ass down in front of the stereo. I listened for hours."

From there, Vanacore's tastes quickly broadened, encompassing everything from fellow metal aggressors Megadeth and Faith No More to the icons of jazz, primarily guitarist Allan Holdsworth and pianist extraordinaire Herbie Hancock. The passion grew and grew to the point that he studied music in higher education, firstly pursuing classical as an undergrad and then, at postgraduate school, jazz. It was shortly after his studies that an old friend from undergrad, who played the flute, approached Vanacore with the chance of drumming in her orchestra during those three life-changing weeks in China.

When Vanacore moved to China in 2012, he settled in the city of Hangzhou, a short distance from Shanghai.

"I was there for about three years," he reflects, "which was a great experience because, during those three years, I had no English-speaking friends. I was just forced to speak Chinese, so my Chinese really started to skyrocket."

However, Hangzhou offered little in the way of a music scene. So, in 2015, Vanacore made the 13-hour drive north to Beijing, where remains today.

"It's probably the most fertile music scene [in the country]. You have a lot of underground music, a lot of experimental stuff, and everything else: pop, jazz, rock, metal. There are quite a few venues."

Vanacore met OU's two other instrumentalists, Zhang and Cui, by playing with them in a jazz fusion band in the Beijing scene. So, when the drummer started writing new metal and prog-flavoured compositions that would eventually form OU's debut album, he immediately asked them to join this fledgling project. Wu entered the fray later on, upon the recommendation of a student Vanacore taught music while in China.

"We met for the first time in 2019," says Vanacore. "We had four songs from the debut album that were already instrumentally recorded, they just needed vocals. The first time [Wu] came in, there weren't lyrics, so she had to vocalise over the melody line. I was completely mind-blown! I had no idea it was going to go so well. Some of those lines were extremely hard and she killed it."

Just five years later, OU are one of the leading lights in Chinese progressive music, endorsed by one of the contemporary genre's greatest labels and produced by one of its most prolific solo acts. They don't have any plans to take their collective foot off the accelerator, either. As he looks to the future, Vanacore reveals the band are already planning album three, plus a computer-animated series inspired by their music.

"We're on a three-album contract with InsideOutMusic," he says, "so there's going to be a third album and some singles. One of them is already written! And we obviously want to do live touring at some point, probably 2025. There's going to be a cool animated series, which is almost completed, about this entity called OU. So, even though we're on the second album, I'd say this is a band that's still in its infancy."

***II: Frailty* is out now.**

II: Frailty is out now via InsideOutMusic. Head over to www.outheband.com for more information.

SHAKAI
FRAGMENTS

OUT NOW!

Featuring drummer Kenneth Kapstad (Spidergawd, ex-Motorpsycho), "Fragments" is the 2nd album from Norwegian jazz band Shakai. The music is both beautiful and raw, playful and strange. Shakai constantly offers new surprises and unexpected elements. For fans of Radka Toneff, Mall Girl and contemporary jazz.

MEER
WHEELS WITHIN WHEELS

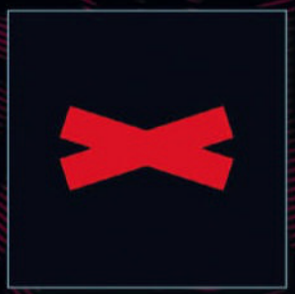
OUT 23.08!

The 3rd album from Norwegian pop proggers MEER is ready, and "Wheels Within Wheels" showcases the band's evolution with tracks that soar to new heights while also delving into moments of intimate reflection, resulting in their most dynamic and immersive work to date. The band has striven to capture the electrifying energy of their live performances, crafting songs that are both expansive and deeply personal, all while maintaining the signature MEER sound.

RITUAL
THE STORY OF MR. BOGD Part 1

OUT 16.08!

One of the legendary bands from the 90's Swedish progressive scene is finally back with a new album, 17 years since the last full-length. On the epic "The Story of Mr. Bogd part 1", Ritual is definitely continuing on this musical journey, and the new songs will hit old and new fans right in the heart.



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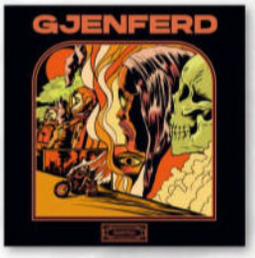

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A Light In The Darkness

Self-exiled Russian artist and the voice behind duo Iamthemorning, **Marjana Semkina** has taken a different approach on her second solo album, *Sirin*. Her trademark melancholy lyrics are now ignited by anger over the political situation in her birth country, in what the singer-songwriter describes as a "unified art project". She discusses the hope, heartbreak and personal cheerleading team that made this exciting release possible.

Words: Jeremy Allen **Images:** Kate Demina

Marjana Semkina's second solo album, *Sirin*, is full of songs of ornate beauty that belie their bleak subject matter. The Russian singer has always had a predilection for the darkest of fairy tales, but, crucially in this real-life story, the world has become a perilous, nightmarish place since she released her solo debut, *Sleepwalking*, in February 2020.

Semkina left St Petersburg in the middle of lockdown that year to take up residence on the Sussex coast, having attained a Tier 1 "exceptional talent" visa. Then, as was the case for millions of others, her world was turned upside down when the country she grew up in invaded Ukraine in February 2022. As Pericles once said: "Just because you do not take an interest in politics doesn't mean politics won't take an interest in you."

"For me, music was always a means of escaping reality," she says from her current home on England's south coast, "because I didn't particularly like reality. I always thought that when art becomes political, it defeats the purpose. Except at some point, there is a line where you can't really avoid it any longer, and when Russia invaded Ukraine, that's when I was like, 'OK, this is it.'

"As a Russian with a conscience, I have a platform and I'm in a safe country. I'm not going to get arrested for saying things that I'm not supposed to say."

Sirin is named after a female-headed bird from Slavic mythology. She lures men to their deaths with her beautiful singing, then weeps for their lost souls. The symbolism is strongly connected to the main theme of the record — the war itself — though, as Iamthemorning fans will know already, death is never too far from Semkina's mind. Why does she think about the final exit so much?

"I think it's something we Russians are born with," she posits, with a sigh of resignation. "Russia has this enormously rich cultural heritage, but most works of art are exceptionally melancholic, and all of them have something to do with death or madness: Dostoevsky, Bulgakov, Prokofiev, Shostakovich… There's a lot of grim stuff that has happened over the centuries in Russia. That very special type of misery just seems to be embedded in our DNA."

The powerful opening track, *We Are The Ocean*, is a defiant riposte; its lyrics include the line: *'Louder/Our voices will ring through the walls of this prison.'* Incarceration would be almost a certainty should Semkina return home any time soon, with sentences of 13 years regularly meted out for criticism of the state.

"No, that would not be smart," she concurs. "I did a lot of things that would get me arrested there."

We Are The Ocean was inspired by friends who went out into the streets in the first weeks of the war, and ended up in prison for protesting peacefully.

New album *Sirin*, a study of light and darkness.

"They even arrested a girl who was standing in a suit with just a blank piece of paper," she says, shaking her head. "And she was making the point that even doing this would be considered worthy of sending someone to jail."

While Semkina feels she's now in a safe country, Gleb Kolyadin, her musical partner in Iamthemorning, had a scare back in January when he and his Russian-Belarusian bandmates in the anti-war, anti-Putin group Bi-2 were held in a shared cell in a Bangkok detention centre for allegedly not having the right permit to play in Thailand. Fears grew that the band would be deported back to Russia.

Semkina, feeling powerless, immediately set up a petition at Change.org, which was quickly signed by more than three and a half thousand people. The international fuss it created helped helm a safe passage for Kolyadin and his band, with all seven members deported to Israel on February 1. Kolyadin is now back in the UK, although fans of the duo will have to wait a while longer for their sixth album, as the pair are both busy with their respective projects.

"He just got a piano," Semkina says, smiling. "So, he's very happy working on an album. He's doing fine. I think he can make a home here even though he never really chose to come here."

A sense of displacement pervades *Sirin*, and even songs that sound hopeful like *The Storm* are anything but.

"I do like a juxtaposition and I think contrasts work really well in art," says Semkina. "If there's darkness, the light will shine brighter."

It's a songwriting technique she picked up from a master.

"I'm happy to say that I'm growing as an artist, which is a normal thing if you work hard. With *Sirin*, I definitely knew what I was doing a bit more."

Marjana Semkina is a genuine, card-carrying "exceptional talent".

Semkina's new album has been buoyed by the support from her fans.

"It's important to show the world that we are against what is happening. It's important for us to do our duty and protest as much as we can."

"Steven Wilson writes in a similar manner in some of his songs, like *Drown With Me*, which is an exceptionally happy-sounding song about somebody who's drowning. So I think I inherited that from him a little bit because I've been listening to Porcupine Tree for a very long time."

However, this doesn't mean there's no hope to be found on *Sirin*.

"There is hope on the record," she affirms, "but that particular song is about my friends in Ukraine. Because of the Russian bombing, they were left without electricity and water for weeks. I have a lot of friends there and I was watching their stories and talking to them while all of this was happening. *The Storm* is an appeal for the war to end, because at this stage, who knows? We didn't think it would last long and now it's been over two years."

These are cataclysmic negatives, though there are at least some tiny cracks of light where one can draw on positives. For Semkina, personally, the Kickstarter campaign she initiated for this album couldn't have gone better, raising nearly £50,000 in just over 24 hours. Her fanbase is fiercely dedicated, with a Patreon community that is vocally supportive of all her endeavours.

"I opened the Patreon in 2019, and it has become this incredible community of people that aren't just supporting me financially. They're also hyping me up. It's my personal cheerleading team!" she enthuses.

Her passionate fanbase have also encouraged Semkina to fulfil some of her wilder dreams when it comes to presentation. With help from Dunk!pressing she's created a unique and very limited run of gold leaf-containing vinyl, complete with a gold foil-stamped sleeve, and there's also a deluxe gold-stamped book version of the CD album available, too, alongside more traditional merchandise accented with metallic gold ink. The visual effect of both is redolent of a Gustav Klimt painting, meaning that it glitters on the outside while at its core beats a gothic heart.

The eagle-eyed will notice that Semkina has also returned the 'j' back in her Christian name, after a brief flirtation with the letter 'i' (ie Mariana, the name her passport bears).

"That was a blip," she concludes.

Her label at the time, Kscope, thought it would be easier to sell the artist without any tricky silent letters in her name.

"Everybody knows me as Marjana with a 'j', and people were complaining that they couldn't find my music anywhere. So, when I left the record label and decided to release this on my own, it felt appropriate to just kind of revert back. They didn't really put pressure on me. They just said that they thought it would be better and I thought, 'Well, that's their profession, they know better.' But yeah, unfortunately, they don't know better."

If Semkina has taken back control then it's certainly working for her so far. She manages herself, which she says can be hard, but she's also overseen the execution of a record that's more confident and coherent, with two dazzling duets in the shape of *Anything But Sleep* with Jim Grey from Caligula's Horse, and *Death And The Maiden* featuring Mick Moss of Antimatter. Back in 2022, she expressed a surprising diffidence about her first solo outing, though there are no sophomore blues with *Sirin*, a work crafted from a very specific vision that holds together musically and aesthetically.

"Don't be a dick," says Semkina. Wise words.

"[*Sleepwalking*] wasn't really meant to be an album," she states. "It happens often where people release their solo work, and it's from 20 years of accumulated material that you wrote and you didn't know why you were writing it. At some point I just decided to compile all of the songs and put them together and release an album, but I didn't ultimately know if it would work. It was the first thing that I did under my own name, which is very different to working with a band where you share responsibility over the outcome. A band situation makes it less stressful for you."

Semkina says her "confidence levels weren't great" at the time either. Her Patreon account, the "exceptional talent" stamp on her passport, and the *Prog* awards that helped her to obtain that coveted stamp from the Arts Council have all done wonders for her confidence as an artist, though. Where *Sleepwalking* was an album she more or less (ahem) sleepwalked into, *Sirin* was written and conceived as "this unified thing".

She adds, "I'm happy to say that I'm growing as an artist, which is a normal thing if you work hard. With *Sirin*, I definitely knew what I was doing a bit more."

Perhaps the most unifying theme on this album is heartbreak in one form or another. From the war, yes, but also from a personal perspective. Lyrics to songs such as *Angel Street*, *Gone* and *Pygmalion* disclose some of the awful treatment that Semkina encountered in a relationship that left her with a wounded heart. Indeed, *Prog* notices a YouTube comment under the video for the stirring latter composition where she writes: "I dedicate this video to my ex," followed by an ironic winking emoji.

"It was a joke to myself, I suppose," she laughs. "He was a really bad person. And things went very badly. But essentially the message of the video to *Pygmalion* is about people that try to bury others, but instead dig holes for themselves." She puts it another way: "Don't be a dick."

Where her previous albums were about escapism, there's an inescapable truth at the centre of *Sirin* that Semkina has come to terms with: you can run, but you can't hide from who you are, or where you come from.

"I was never a big fan of Russia," she says, "and I'm not a very proud Russian, but I feel that it's important to mention it, because where we grow up defines us. In a way it can define you as someone who grew up to be the person that you are in spite of where you grew up. And I think it's very important to own it.

"I know a lot of musicians that are now trying to hide the fact that they're Russian and I think it's very, very cowardly to do that. I'll not magically turn into a British person even when I get citizenship and a blue passport next year. So, *Sirin* is open about the fact: I'm Russian, deal with it. Because it's important to show the world that we are against what is happening. It's important for us to do our duty and protest as much as we can."

Sirin is out now via Bandcamp.
See marjanasemkina.com for more information.

The Moody Blues: one of Deram's earliest successes.

DERAM DECCA

Daze Of Future Passed

When starched-shirt British jazz and classical label Decca decided to 'get hip', they started the offshoot **Deram** and opened the doors to psychedelia and prog rock, launching some of the biggest and best-loved acts in our world - and some minnows that slipped the net. Upcoming anthology *Psych! British Prog, Rock, Folk & Blues 1966-73* documents the scene, and David Hitchcock, Pye Hastings, Davy O'List and more cast their minds back to those wonder years.

Words: Mike Barnes **Image:** Press/Universal Music Archive

"A hip label for groovy people" was how Decca Records subsidiary Deram was announced in *Melody Maker* on its inception in September 1966. This separated it from the rather fusty image of its parent company, which was formed in 1929 and had an impressive back catalogue of jazz and classical recordings. It was well-known that while they'd signed The Rolling Stones and Marc Bolan (and were soon to sign Bowie), they'd passed on The Beatles and the label's roster included Val Doonican and Mantovani. With Swinging London in full spate they needed a bigger piece of that action, focusing on a younger market.

Deram was formed by Decca executive Tony Hall and A&R Head Hugh Mendl, the name coming from a trademark they owned for a now-defunct ceramic hi-fi cartridge. Hall stated that Deram was to have "all the enthusiasm of an independent with all the power and promotion behind it of a major company". To hit their market, Mendl sought out younger people in A&R, so in 1967 they employed a teenage David Hitchcock as 'Sleeve Co-ordinator', liaising between A&R and the art studio. Decca were signing "anything and everything" he says, recalling: "Hugh Mendl's attitude was 'Surround yourself with bright people and give them the freedom to fail.' We failed, but sometimes we hit gold too. I'd meet Hugh and talk about bands I'd seen in clubs I'd gone to, like UFO."

> **"Caravan's *If I Could Do It All Over Again I'd Do It All Over You* came out on Decca, then they were switched to Deram, then later switched back. I've no idea why."**
> **David Hitchcock**

Although touted as the cool offshoot, some of Deram's earliest releases were easy-listening albums, and some of the trendier bands came out on Decca.

"The allocation was really bizarre," says Hitchcock today. "Caravan's *If I Could Do It All Over Again I'd Do It All Over You* came out on Decca, then they were switched to Deram, then later switched back. I've no idea why."

The Moody Blues' *Days Of Future Passed* album was released on Deram.

The advent of psychedelia prompted many British bands to stop playing covers, sideline American influences and explore their heritage. Some got rather whimsical. Deram signings Curiosity Shoppe threw back to Ye Olde England; Tinkerbells Fairydust recorded an early song by Jeff Lynne, their name setting a high bar for twee; The Fire – featuring guitarist Dave Lambert, later of the Strawbs – visited the metaphorical sweetshops of childhood on their single *Treacle Toffee World*.

Teenage guitarist Davy O'List was playing covers in The Soul System, but renamed and realigned the band as The Attack in late 1966. They seemed the epitome of a Deram band but signed to Decca in 1967.

"I had an exact idea – original British rock, which hadn't been done before," says O'List. "I promoted us as a mod band, because that was fashionable. We got signed straight away to the Small Faces' manager, Don Arden, with The Move. He had a deal with Decca that allowed him to put out records."

Arden's reputation was formidable, but it wasn't unusual for managers to have this sort of arrangement, giving labels first refusal on their bands.

The Attack released a single, *Hi Ho Silver Lining*, in March 1967, which tanked as Jeff Beck's version came out simultaneously. The B-side was the tougher, proto-psychedelic *Any More Than I Do*.

"I wanted more of a rock sound," says O'List. But in April, he was gone, having been offered good money by Andrew Loog Oldham to be in soul singer PP Arnold's backing band with organist Keith Emerson, bassist Lee Jackson and, initially, Ian Hague on drums. Arnold invited them to play their own opening set – O'List recalls writing *War And Peace* and *Bonnie K* – and they morphed into The Nice.

The Moody Blues' album *Days Of Future Passed*, released on Deram in November 1967, was one of the label's early successes. A suggestion from their A&R director Dick Rowe that they cover *Somewhere Over The Rainbow* was not well-received. But they were invited to record an album for the stereo showcase Deramic Sound System series, named after a recording technique that gave a wider spread of sound by using crossover echo on the strings.

PICTORIAL PRESS LTD / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

PICTORIAL PRESS LTD / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Giles, Giles And Fripp promo pic (above) and their *Cheerful Insanity...* album (below).

"He said, 'I don't know what you're doing, but it's jolly good, so carry on and do it.' We said, 'No one will interfere with us then?' And he said, 'Not at all. Just go in and do what you want.'"

Decca and Deram's output was prolific as they had their own studios in London's West Hampstead, which was much cheaper than using a commercial studio, and, as Hitchcock

"They jumped at the chance," says Hitchcock. "They wanted to do a concept album, as did many bands post-*Sgt Pepper*. But it had to have strings on for the Deramic Sound System to work so they agreed to have backing by the London Festival Orchestra."

In 1969 Hitchcock looked at moving to RCA, but, he recalls, Mendl suggested, "'Why don't you stay and be a producer?' I said I'd never been in the studio or done any recording and he said, 'It doesn't matter, that's what you've got engineers for.' For a certain style of production he's absolutely right. You'll say, 'This is what I want to hear' and the engineer will make that real, as a cameraman will for a film director. I was there to show the band the possibilities that suited their music and represent them on record as excitingly as possible."

Following their commercial success, The Moodies took up residence in Studio 1 and were left to their own devices. In 2015, guitarist and singer Justin Hayward described to journalist Michael McCarty a meeting between the group and Decca Chairman Sir Edward Lewis.

Above: The Attack in 1967 (L-R): Richard Shirman, Gerry Henderson, Davy O'List, Bob Hodges, Barney Barnmfield.

Caravan in 1971 (right) and their *In The Land Of Grey And Pink* album.

PRESS/CARAVAN ARCHIVES

“We didn’t want to do those posey pop photos. I tried all the hippie stuff for a couple of months - the kaftan, the flares - it felt false. So I reverted to my Englishness and to hell with what everybody else was doing.”

Michael Giles

states, only three to five per cent of records make serious money and 90 per cent don’t make any, but nobody knows which one will succeed.

On the production line was Wembley’s The Syn, who grew into Yes, and Southend’s Procol Harum, alongside Bournemouth trio Giles, Giles And Fripp, who released *The Cheerful Insanity Of Giles, Giles And Fripp* on Deram in 1968. The group would lead to the very serious King Crimson, but then played idiosyncratic songs and came across as a comedy band, gurning rural types in ties and tweeds, with guitarist Robert Fripp sporting a bald wig.

“It was meant to be incongruous and absurd, but that’s the way we were expressing ourselves at that time,” says Michael Giles. “We didn’t want to do those posey pop photos. I tried all the hippie stuff for a couple of months — the kaftan, the flares — it felt false. So I reverted to my Englishness and to hell with what everybody else was doing.”

Progressive rock was growing out of psych, typified by Egg, a trio of Dave Stewart on keyboards, drummer Clive Brooks, and Mont Campbell on bass and vocals, who released *Seven Is A Jolly Good Time* on Deram in August 1969. One of the few prog novelty singles, it’s a kind bluffer’s guide to time signatures, with a singalong chorus. However, “it was never going to be a hit,” says Campbell. “It could have been a very good song, but it was too badly recorded, for one thing.”

The band released two LPs — *Egg* (1970) and *The Polite Force* (1971) — on Deram, featuring an abundance of tricky time signatures. Campbell, a classically trained French horn player, says, “I was too musically over-educated to be a rock musician.”

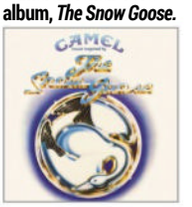
Egg’s lofty ambitions led to a 20-minute composition named *Symphony No.2*, but when a friend sent a copy of *The Polite Force* to American composer Aaron Copland, Campbell had his pretensions punctured.

“[He said] We were ‘counting freaks’. It took me years to get over being told that! But he was right — that’s what we were.”

David Hitchcock was most closely associated with Caravan, getting them signed and producing their albums from *In The Land Of Grey And Pink* (1971) through to *Blind Dog At St. Dunstans* (1976). He made some structural and arrangement suggestions for songs on *Girls Who Grow Plump In The Night* and also piqued Caravan’s interest in unusual time signatures by playing them albums by jazz trumpeter Don Ellis, who composed in metres of 19/8 and 27/16.

PRESS/CAMEL ARCHIVES/BARRY PLUMMER

Camel and their 1975 album, *The Snow Goose*.



“David was the perfect fit and we were extremely lucky to have been singled out by him to join Decca when the artists were given so much freedom to experiment,” says guitarist-vocalist Pye Hastings. “He recognised early on what was going to work. Apart from being a brilliant producer, he could see us potentially pulling in different directions and subtly steered the project.

“I would always run new songs past David for his opinion before committing to recording, as this would save any embarrassment later on when confronted by a complete howler. We’ve all written one or two of those, believe me.”

PRESS/DERAM ARCHIVE

After shortening their name, Principal Edwards signed to Deram.

***Psych! British Prog, Rock, Folk & Blues 1966-73* is out now.**

Camel also recorded for Deram and Decca, with Hitchcock producing *Mirage* and *The Snow Goose* in 1974 and 1975 respectively.

“On *The Snow Goose*, we wanted a repetitive guitar motif [on *Preparation*], for about three minutes, so we recorded a 32-foot tape loop that went all around the control room and then put that onto another multitrack. Andy Latimer could have played it for three minutes, but it wouldn’t have had the same feel.”

It was a difficult commission with Latimer and keyboardist Peter Bardens constantly arguing, and the band were frustrated by the drum sound and with overdubbing keyboard and guitars over the rhythm section for separation.

“It was almost like it was jinxed, so we decided to scrap it all and redo it in Island Studios,” Hitchcock says.

Examples of the 90 per cent of the bands that didn’t make it, produced by Hitchcock, were Walrus, Aardvark and Satisfaction (“One of the best horn sections ever”) and he has a fondness for Mellow Candle, whose 1972 album *Swaddling Songs* is now regarded as a lost folk-rock classic.

East Of Eden had travelled from psychedelia to more progressive territory but found themselves largely overlooked, apart from their anomalous 1970 hit single, *Jig-a-Jig*, which was originally a live encore.

Pink Floyd’s Nick Mason produced one of Deram’s most ambitious bands, Principal Edwards Magic Theatre, which featured dancers and dramatic elements onstage. Guitarist Root Cartwright wanted to take rock music and “broaden it out and make life more interesting”. They started on John Peel’s Dandelion label, and, as Principal Edwards, recorded two singles and their final album, *Round One*, for Deram in 1973-4. Keeping afloat financially proved impossible, however.

“We were trying to do a complete show in the way that Genesis or Pink Floyd did, but with about a thousandth of the budget,” recalls Cartwright.

By the mid-70s, Deram’s heyday was over, but, with Decca, had given a chance to some of the most inventive, imaginative and eccentric talent of the psychedelic and progressive era.

Their ethos can be summed up by Mendl’s response to Hitchcock when asked why he released records by the highly rated British saxophonist John Surman that were unlikely to shift units.

“Hugh said, ‘That’s not the point. We *can* do, we should do, so we *do* do it. It might not be commercial today or further down the line, but it’s important that the art be preserved.’”

Psych! British Prog, Rock, Folk & Blues 1966-73 is out now via Decca. See shop.decca.com for more information.

Dark Delights

Former The Eden House vocalist, **Louise Patricia Crane** confronts her inner demons on her second solo album. Set against a backdrop of Irish folk and mythology, *Netherworld* finds the Northern Irish singer-songwriter embarking on a healing journey with a cast that includes Jakko Jakszyk and Ian Anderson. *Prog* caught up with her to find out more.

Words: Rich Wilson **Images:** Carrie Davenport

There's a touch of the throwback about Louise Patricia Crane. Such a term is frequently used as a snide weapon of criticism, but Crane is a cerebral retreat to an era of Dylans and Mitchells where musicians readily purged personal trauma with soulful music to match. She possesses an honest fragility that provokes thought, without ever venturing into the mawkish world of oversharing or mere attention-seeking, in the current era of talent-compromised self-promoters.

Crane's work with dark proggers The Eden House led to her recording a solo album, 2020's *The Deep Blue*, which was unanimously lauded for its ambition. Given such palpable talent, it comes as quite a surprise to learn of her peculiar lack of self-confidence.

"I felt like I had things that I wanted to say and I had musical interests and influences that were never part of what I had done before," she says. "I really strongly felt that I had something to say in my own voice. I think that with each different thing that I did, each band, each time that I wrote a song there was always a little increase of self-belief there and self-esteem. To be asked to do an audition for The Eden House, and to then get a place within that band was quite a leap forward in terms of self-confidence. That was the moment when I thought maybe I could do this.

***Netherworld* is out on June 21.**

"It really was about growing in confidence to think that this doesn't have to be a dream, it can be a reality. I *can* write songs. I *can* go forward with this and I started to think, 'Gosh, maybe I'm not a piece of shit then.'"

Such a brutal self-assessment is disarmingly stark and provides a glimpse into the psyche that drives the music on Crane's latest release, *Netherworld*. Musically, it moves away from some of the more gothic influences that drove its predecessor towards a sound that hints at the musical whimsy that permeated the likes of Gabriel-era Genesis.

"There's a difference between the two albums," she concedes. "I think on this record, it's very much progressive music. Everything that falls under that umbrella. In particular, though, early Genesis, early Crimson, but also *Thrak*-era Crimson. David Sylvian's *Secrets Of The Beehive* album and Joni Mitchell's *Chalk Mark In A Rainstorm* were a big influence when I was writing *Netherworld*.

"*Trespass* was one of the absolute first LPs that I bought at a record fair in Belfast. I had no idea what the music would sound like but I just thought that the artwork was beautiful. I ended up falling in love with that and I'd always wanted to do something of my own that had an evocative, otherworldly quality to it. At the time I got that record I didn't have any idea what prog was. I didn't know that's what it was. It was just happenstance that I started loving that, and *In The Court Of The Crimson King*. Jazz is an influence on this record, too."

Crane's main musical collaborator is once again King Crimson guitarist/vocalist Jakko Jakszyk. Yet for the first few months of writing, she reveals that it was effectively a fully solo venture, as she adopted a hermit-like existence in her home studio, trying to craft the initial demos.

"I knew that after *Deep Blue*, having not physically written or composed music myself, I was determined to be self-sufficient in a way that I hadn't previously been," she explains. "In 2020, I built a home studio over a period of about six months. I basically locked myself away and got to grips with [music creation software] Logic Pro. I just started composing songs here at home. That really cost me my social life, but it was a sacrifice that I'm glad I made. I was locked in this sort of hermetic space and just following the emotion of the songs in my head. It was the most excited that I've ever been about writing songs. It was completely from the heart and it was so real. Jakko was on tour with Crimson, so it was a case of nailing him down when he had some time

Louise Patricia Crane has been following her emotions down the rabbit hole.

"I think on this record, it's very much progressive music. Everything that falls under that umbrella. In particular though, early Genesis, early Crimson but also *Thrak*-era Crimson. David Sylvian's *Secrets Of The Beehive* album and Joni Mitchell's *Chalk Mark In A Rainstorm*."

The hermit life has paid off handsomely.

between tours. I'd send him my demos and we would discuss things and throw things back and forth. There were even some a cappella songs because I wanted to see what he would build around that. I've never been more psychically linked to somebody in my life. We have a very strong connection with songwriting. Jakko just has this understanding of music that you can't put your finger on. It's just an emotional thing."

For all the moments of musical elegance that fill tracks such as *Tiny Bard*, written about her departed cat Bosco and featuring Ian Anderson on flute, or *The Red Room*, it's the frequently biting lyrical content that provides a startling honesty. Few artists can present lyrics that are as immensely cathartic, frequently dabbling in subjects that most songwriters would shy away from recounting in such a public forum. Delving into family history and personal demons, those personal recollections are deftly formed around fairy tales, as Crane explains.

"I had in my mind that I basically wanted to create an album about my life," she considers. "After *Deep Blue*, I knew I wanted to dare myself to be vulnerable in my songwriting and push myself further as a songwriter on the next record. On that first album, I was still self-conscious about revealing too much, despite what I felt around that time or wanted to say. The big thing for me was progressing in every sense. I wanted this to be a full artistic vision. I've always been attracted to interplays, dark and light, and how that informs who we are and the human condition. In Celtic folklore, there's the other world, which is like a spirit realm. For me, I wanted to explore the spirits of my own past and present. Some that are good and some that aren't, of course.

> "For years, I buried my head in the sand about certain things, but the only way to heal and improve is to see reality for what it is."

"One of the things that I do confront on this record is my self-destructive nature," she continues. "That peaked around the time that I was finishing *Deep Blue*, when I still lived in Cambridge, but it spilled over into my life when I moved back over to Ireland in 2019. I acknowledged a masochistic side of myself and it forced me to go back and take stock of my life from the ground up. You know, nature versus nurture. I'm definitely more aware of my vulnerabilities and at times it can be quite difficult facing up to those things. For years, I buried my head in the sand about certain things, but the only way to heal and improve is to see reality for what it is."

This prompts the question of whether Crane has revealed too much, penning songs that are so close to the bone that performing them live could prove impossible without bowing to the emotion the lyrics will evoke. Is that something she's aware of?

"Yeah, absolutely, and there are definitely a few on this album," she concludes. "Namely *Little Ghost In The Room* and *Thieves Fools And Crows*. *Little Ghost In The Room* is about my relationship with my mother when I was growing up as a child. That was hard; it was hard to even think about. It is about trying to find a maternal bond with my mother, not really being there and not really understanding that. You could almost understand why as an adult you might self-medicate and struggle to deal with those things. Also, *Bête Noire* and *Dance With The Devil* look at the self-destructive hedonistic side of me as a person. That is part of my nature that I don't think I will ever be able to get rid of. It's part of who I am."

Netherworld is out on June 21 via Peculiar Doll. See louisepatriciacrane.com for more information.

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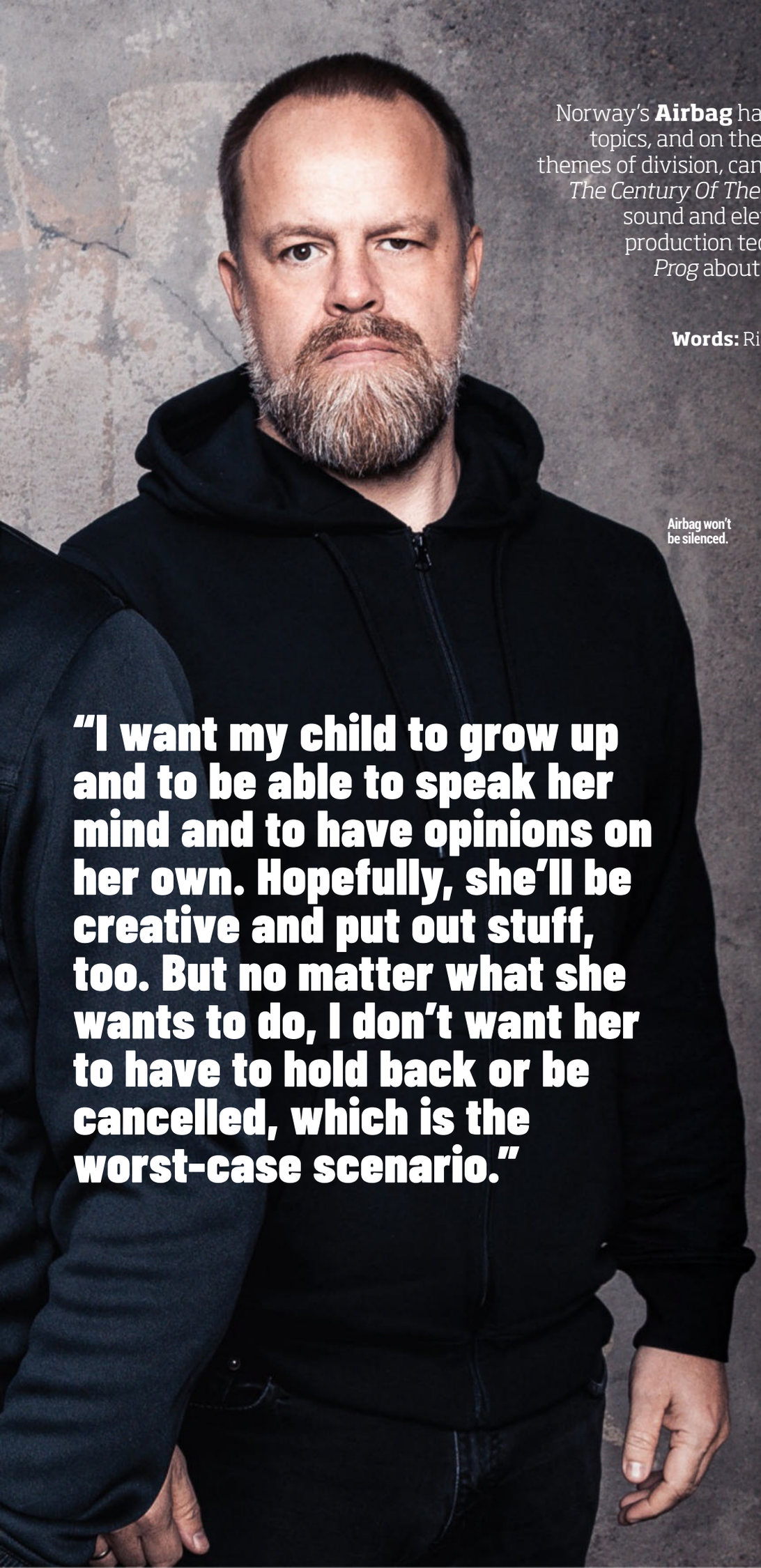


Norway's **Airbag** have never shied away from heavy topics, and on their sixth studio album, they tackle themes of division, cancel culture and rewriting history. *The Century Of The Self* takes their trademark guitar sound and elevates it with bold new sonics and production techniques. Guitarist Bjørn Riis tells *Prog* about its creation and being part of the Cruise To The Edge "family".

Words: Rich Wilson **Images:** Anne-Marie Forker

Airbag won't be silenced.

"I want my child to grow up and to be able to speak her mind and to have opinions on her own. Hopefully, she'll be creative and put out stuff, too. But no matter what she wants to do, I don't want her to have to hold back or be cancelled, which is the worst-case scenario."

"It's funny because our debut album, *Identity*, has just celebrated its 15th anniversary," says Airbag's guitarist Bjørn Riis with a hint of wistfulness. "I sat down and listened to the album yesterday and I really think that we've come a long way. There have been some personnel changes, and we've evolved as a band in many ways, which I think is something that you can hear on this new album."

It feels as though these Norwegians have been around for several decades, such has their impact been on the current progressive scene. Their current release, *The Century Of The Self*, is their sixth full album, and reaffirms their distinctive style that frequently hints at Porcupine Tree and Pink Floyd. It's probably such musical similarities that have led to criticism in some quarters, but is that something that bothers Riis? There are, after all, far worse acts that modern musicians could be compared to.

"Yeah, absolutely," he says, laughing in agreement. "I mean, they're two of the biggest bands in the genre. We grew up listening to Pink Floyd, they've been a huge part of our youth, our formative years as musicians and our early albums. So, Pink Floyd is definitely in our DNA. I guess we discovered Porcupine Tree when we started to write our own music. Porcupine Tree, No-Man and all of Steve Wilson's and Tim Bowness's projects have been huge inspirations and are very important to us. I discovered Pink Floyd in my late teens. I grew up listening to Kiss, Black Sabbath, Zeppelin and stuff. I come from a background of what you now call classic rock. I was into the hair metal stuff in the 80s. I hated grunge. Progressive rock and bands like Genesis and Pink Floyd came to me much later. Our vocalist, Asle [Tostrup], has been a huge Radiohead fan for years, since the early 90s. I'm also a huge film score fanatic. I believe that once you put all of those influences into the pot, then that's the Airbag sound."

That Airbag sound is certainly readily identifiable, but the band remain far from predictable.

Their previous release, 2020's *A Day At The Beach*, harked back to the 80s, with era-stamped synth sounds combining with spacious film score cinematics to produce one of their finest releases. Such a concept was also explored by bands such as Haken, whose *Affinity* album also possessed a retrospective sound. These dalliances with the past do, however, tend to be fleeting, and *The Century Of The Self* moves away from that template to return to a more recognisable Airbag sound. Not that it was a deliberate decision taken by the band before writing commenced.

Airbag, L-R: Bjørn Riis, Asle Tostrup, Henrik Bergan Fossum.

"I think that the album originally started out as a continuation of *A Day At The Beach*," suggests Riis. "It was more 80s-influenced stuff, with loud keyboards, but also with some new arrangements and a lot of guitars. So we had these ideas, which were in demo form, and we started working on them as a band. At that time, it was actually a trio with myself and Henrik [Bergan Fossum], who's the drummer and our bassist. We spent about six months just rehearsing the songs and working out the arrangements. Doing that turned the songs into more of a classic rock thing, and it really became more of a power trio. We sat down in production and began adding other elements and realised that the material didn't fit the 80s synth approach that we had on the last album.

"So, yes, there are certainly some electronic elements on the album, but it's much more organic this time around. It was a fairly easy album to write. It usually starts off with me sitting at home with a guitar or a piano and just writing some basic ideas. I remember that it came fairly easily, as did most of the lyrics. The initial ideas and demos were recorded over a period of a couple of weeks. We then spent about a year working on the material, recording and producing it. The whole process took about a couple of years. You know, we all have families and we have other jobs. So, we really only have a certain amount of time to spend on the band. Two years is quite quick for us."

Allowing material to organically grow over a period of many months has clearly been hugely beneficial. The music isn't forced and Airbag were able to naturally supplement and enhance the tracks, embellishing them organically over time, devoid of any intrusive, commercial pressures.

"Yeah, we don't have a record company who are demanding a release," nods Riis. "We set a temporary date when we wanted the album to be finished. At the same time, we've also learned over the years that it's important to have deadlines. If you don't, you can just go on forever and go mad."

Airbag have also avoided the temptation of making this concept album too long. Harking back to the past but appreciating the resurgence of vinyl as a format, it runs for around 45 minutes, which for many remains the perfect length. There are progressive acts who delight in cramming 84 minutes of music onto a CD, but this frequently means that tracks are padded out, diminishing the impact of the material.

"It often does," agrees Riis. "I still like the vinyl format and we obviously grew up listening to vinyl. Apart from the occasional live album, I never really liked the double album. I want our listeners to have the same experience that I had with [music] growing up. You get an album, you look at the cover, read the liner notes, and you know every producer and every engineer. It seems that 40-45 minutes is just the correct time. There's very little room for having bad tracks — you have to be very clear on what you want to have on the record. That's absolutely something that we try to have in our minds when we work on an album. I also think the concept has very much the vinyl format in mind. You have to have a strong opener and then you tell the story on side A. You then have a strong opener on side B and you close the whole concept at the end."

The concept that the guitarist references on the album is a brave one. Music and politics have been frequent bedfellows throughout history and while this album is far from a ranting protest record, it addresses issues many are fearful of confronting. In an age of modern 'woke' McCarthyism, where a careless sentence can result in public, online flogging, Airbag are one of a number of acts who've audibly rebelled against such perceived restraints. Prog supergroup trio Six By Six hinted at the issue on their latest album (see *Prog* 150), and Roger Waters has also railed against those who misinterpret his intentions.

"I don't think that it was a deliberate attempt to be brave," reflects Riis carefully. "But we are all closing in on 50. We all have kids and we talk a lot about what sort of society our kids are growing up in. Obviously, that's the whole cancel culture thing and woke. I'm terrified of it because I want my child to grow up and to be able to speak her mind and to have opinions on her own. Hopefully, she'll be creative and put out stuff, too. But no matter what she wants to do, I don't want her to have to hold back or be cancelled, which is the worst-case scenario.

"We sat down in production and began adding other elements and realised that the material didn't fit the 80s synth approach that we had on the last album."

"But you see it all the time. It's not that hard over here in Norway yet, but it affects politicians, movies and everything. When you look to the United States, I can't imagine how it is to be an artist over there or a politician. When you put yourself on social media, put an album out, put a book out and a minute later you're cancelled. That is a frightening thought. [The song] *Tyrants And Kings* is about people that force you to have an opinion that indoctrinates you in one way or another. I had some ideas of what I wanted to write about, we discussed it, put down some ideas on what we wanted to reflect on the album. I think together with the music, which is important to us, we told a powerful story. We have a strong voice on this album."

Lyrically, on tracks such as *Dysphoria*, *Erase* and *Tyrants And Kings*, there's a darkness that matches the oppressive subject matter and musical backdrop. Yet the album is far from a depressing listen, something that's highlighted in the final track, *Tear It Down*, which provides an uplifting ending.

"I think with that one, we debated whether it's going to be just everything going straight to hell or whether we have a more positive end to it," he says. "The lyrics are really a summing-up from all the other songs. But the message is just tear it down. Wake up and start all over. Let's go back to the values that we fought for."

Another of Airbag's defining features over their lifespan has been their distinctive cover art, designed by vocalist Asle Tostrup. Previously, his work has had the air of Hipgnosis about it, not least on their last album that portrayed countless teddy bears, heads buried on a sandy beach. For *The Century Of The Self*, that glossy, imaginative design has been replaced by a solitary red 'X' on a black background. It's an image that hints at censorship that ties in with the album's concept.

"Asle is a graphic designer, so he's done all our artwork and promotional material," explains Riis. "We had so many ideas for this cover, but we narrowed it down to this mark or 'X', whatever you want to call it. I think that it's just a very strong image for the theme of the album."

The band are set to tour over the summer, with an intention of recording one of the shows for subsequent release. Further dates are also being scheduled for 2025. Although finances may not yet permit lengthy global tours, it's clear that the band adore performing live, something that was reinforced by their recent third appearance at Cruise To The Edge.

"That's also always such a great experience. We get to see some excellent bands, meet friends and just have a good time. It's always great fun to be there. I believe that there's something special about the prog community. At events like that, everyone comes together and it is like being part of a big family."

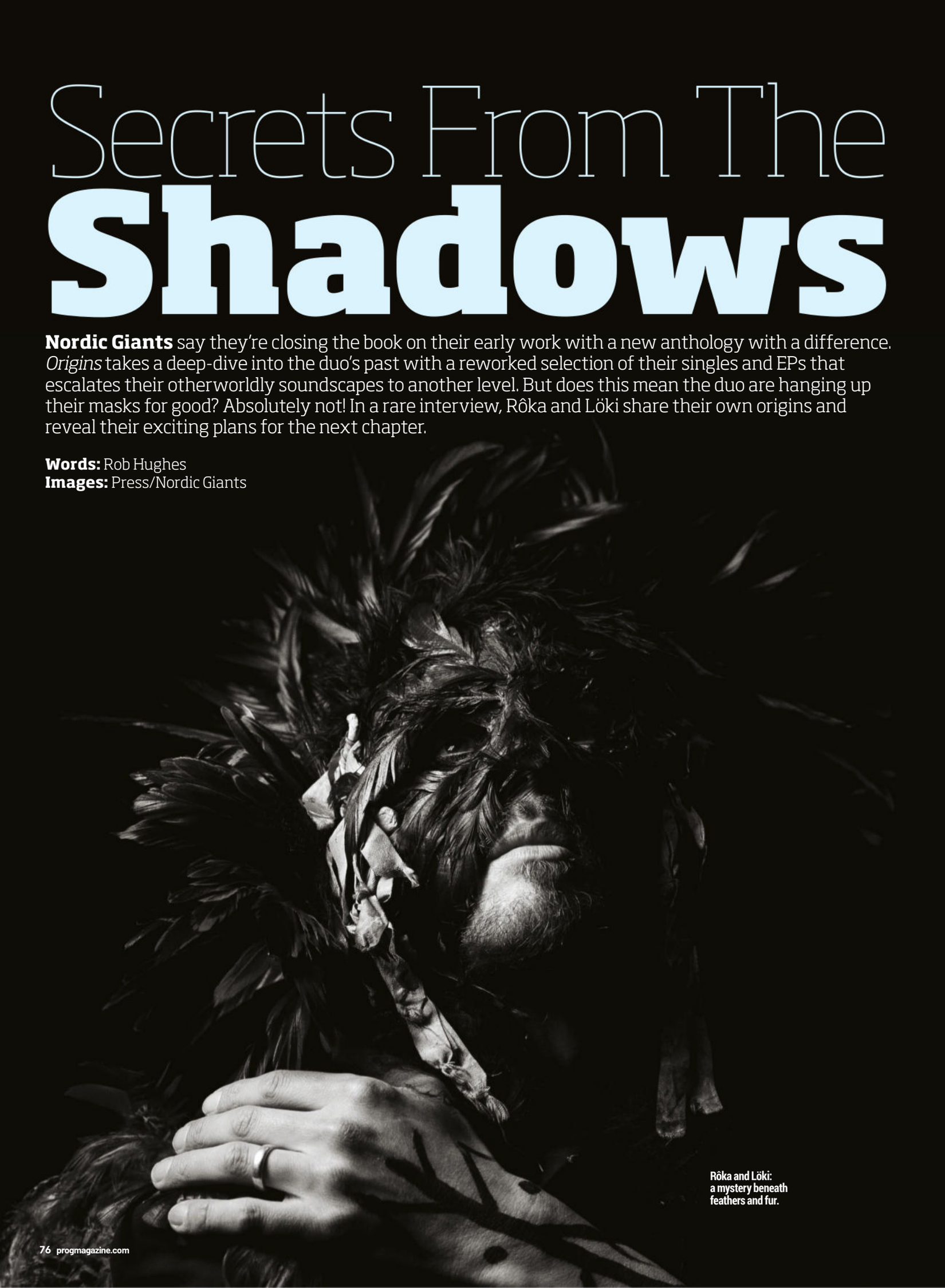
New album, *The Century Of The Self*, is out now.

The Century Of The Self is out now via Karisma. See www.airbagsound.com for more information.

Secrets From The Shadows

Nordic Giants say they're closing the book on their early work with a new anthology with a difference. *Origins* takes a deep-dive into the duo's past with a reworked selection of their singles and EPs that escalates their otherworldly soundscapes to another level. But does this mean the duo are hanging up their masks for good? Absolutely not! In a rare interview, Rôka and Löki share their own origins and reveal their exciting plans for the next chapter.

Words: Rob Hughes
Images: Press/Nordic Giants



Rôka and Löki: a mystery beneath feathers and fur.

There's a lot to unpack with Nordic Giants. Foremost is the music: ululating soundscapes of extraordinary power and dynamic range, instrumentals with a richly cinematic hue. Then there's the immersive aspect of their live performances, wherein flashing strobes, carpets of fog and offbeat film projections help create a shifting dramatic theatre of the senses.

At the centre of all this are the Giants. The mysterious Rôka and Löki hide their identities behind feathered masks, capes and animal-skin costumes. One presides over a keyboard, occasionally getting brassy with a trumpet. The other pounds away on drums, or straps on a guitar, sometimes playing it with a violin bow. They never speak onstage. You might think you've stepped into some druidic ceremonial ritual, a warrior symphony relayed by mythical creatures from Norse folklore. Some have even likened it to a religious experience.

So who exactly are these masked men? And where do they come from? The truth, as is often the case, is a little more prosaic. Both Giants are British, for starters. And it was Brighton's indie-rock scene, rather than some curious outpost of Northern Europe, that sired them.

"When we started out, we were looking for ways to fill the void," explains Rôka. "Löki is a filmmaker and I'm a film lover, so the visual aspect was something we talked about. Then the idea came to integrate films into our live shows. Plus we'd both been in so many bands where you just walk onstage in your normal clothes, whereas the bigger acts are all dressed in something more elaborate. And I think we just took that idea to the extreme. We wanted people to go, 'What the hell is this?!'"

"All that stuff about chatting to the crowd in between songs, trying to tell jokes or flog your merch over the clinking of glasses, never sat comfortably with us," adds Löki. "So being able to do something more mysterious really appealed, where you're just fully ingrained in the show."

Nordic Giants have released three essential studio albums over the past decade. The fourth and latest, however, is a little different. *Origins* reaches back into their earlier recordings — 2010 EP *A Tree As Old As Me*, both sides of follow-up singles *Shine* and *Speed The Crow's Nest*, plus a track from 2013's *Dismantle Suns* EP — and frames them anew. The duo revisited the original sessions and reworked certain elements using live strings, piano, synths, guitar and drums. The effect is spectacular, throwing the peaks and valleys of their sound into greater relief and giving the songs the kind of visceral urgency (and subtle beauty) more akin to latterday Giants. To all intents and purposes, they're self-curating, scaling themselves up.

"That first EP wasn't actually recorded in the studio," recalls Rôka. "It was recorded with one microphone, because we had very limited equipment. And it was the first thing that brought Nordic Giants together. We thought it'd be good to go back into these songs that we've been playing live for years, re-record them and have some fun. At the same time, we tried to keep them as true to the originals as possible."

On some level, *Origins* feels like the closing of a chapter.

"I think you could put it like that," affirms Rôka. "The other thing for us was the inclusion of songs like *Together*, which was originally just a B-side, but which became one of our most-loved songs. It'd never been released before on vinyl, so it was a good excuse to get everything onto one neat package, something to celebrate the origins of Nordic Giants."

This is where things get a little cagey. *Prog* is obliged to keep the finer details of the Giants' early days under a certain amount of secrecy, as is their wish. Inevitably, this gives their story a nebulous quality, but it also feeds into their shadowy creation myth.

The son of a folk singer, Löki spent his childhood "dragged around clubs, sleeping in the back of venues". Unsurprisingly, it shaped his young musical life — he became proficient on a number of instruments, while nurturing an interest in filmmaking. By contrast, Rôka is from a non-musical family, but started on violin at six. He began playing drums at 10.

"We'd both wanted to do something different, then stumbled upon these other genres of post-rock and prog. And I guess we fell in love with it."

Rôka

"My mother wanted me to be a musician, because she loved Elvis," he says with a laugh. "And once I'd discovered the drums, there was no going back after that. I've always been motivated by music, really."

The pair first met down on the East Sussex coast around 2010, playing together in a nine-piece band. There was no masterplan. Rather, Nordic Giants happened by circumstance.

"It just kind of came down to me and Rôka being the only ones that turned up at band practice," explains Löki. "So we decided to form a two-piece."

Out went the indie-rock, replaced by something more challenging and experimental.

"Our guitarist in the nine-piece group had introduced us to a lot of music that myself and Löki didn't know," Rôka recalls. "Sigur Rós, This Will Destroy You and all the post-rock bands. And we bonded around that. We'd both wanted to do something different, then stumbled upon these other genres of post-rock and prog. And I guess we fell in love with it."

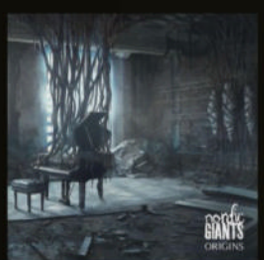
Löki continues the story: "It was also that time in your 20s when you're constantly exploring new stuff. I've always loved jazz and classical music as well, so we started to fuse all those influences together. And not being limited to a three-and-a-half-minute song gives you more room to make a story. It was perfect for us, I think."

A key aspect of the Giants' music is the assimilation of samples. The aforementioned *Together*, for instance, features Martin Luther King's stirring 'Beyond Vietnam' address from 1967. Another *Origins* highlight, the epic *Dark Clouds Mean War*, plunders Rod Steiger's abdication speech as Napoleon in 1970's *Waterloo*.

In the absence of lyrics, these elements bring a deeper intent to the Giants' work. As does the addition of guest vocalists. *Origins* alone includes memorable turns from Freyja, Cate Ferris, Jake Reid and Amdine, relatively obscure names dating back to their Brighton days.

> "I've always loved jazz and classical music, so we started to fuse all those influences together. Not being limited to a three-and-a-half-minute song gives you more room to make a story. It was perfect for us."
>
> **Löki**

Nordic Giants: neither Nordic, nor giants. But still awesome.



"A lot of these singers were just starting out or hadn't done much previously," explains Rôka, "so they were all as mysterious as us. We really liked that about them."

If *Origins* marks the end of a chapter, where does the next begin? It transpires that Nordic Giants are currently recording their first album of all-new songs since 2022's *Symbiosis*.

"Our albums always have many different styles going on, but I definitely think there's more of a prog feel to this one," reveals Rôka. "It has a heavier vibe."

Adds Löki: "The studio down in Eastbourne has a room packed full of vintage synths, so there's lots of those on there, and also more organic sounds as well. And a lot of strings."

Due for release around September, the as-yet-unnamed album will be accompanied by British dates at the end of the year. And Rôka says that February or March should hopefully see "a massive tour around Europe and the UK supporting one of our early influences. But we won't name who it is yet." Cryptic to the last.

In the meantime, the Giants are toasting *Origins*' arrival by sharing a collection of old gig photos, behind-the-scenes footage and, most intriguingly, a written saga that reveals undisclosed details about the twosome and a possible glimpse of the men behind the feathered headdresses.

They even toyed with the idea of unmasking themselves for *Prog*, only to decide against it. Instead, we speak through audio-only Zoom.

"This is still one of the first interviews we've ever done, because we tend to stay away from all that," reasons Rôka. "But we know there's only so far you can get with not doing anything on social media and staying off the internet. And being masked does limit you. At the same time, we're leaving them on for now. We want to let the music speak for itself."

Origins is out now via Nice Weather For Airstrikes. See www.nordicgiants.co.uk for more information.

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THE PROG INTERVIEW

RICHARD THOMPSON

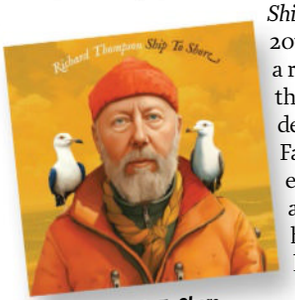
Every month we get inside the mind of one of the biggest names in music. This issue it's **Richard Thompson**. Best known for co-founding Fairport Convention in the 60s, the British singer and guitarist has gone on to enjoy a successful solo career with his distinctive brand of progressive folk and was even awarded an OBE from Queen Elizabeth II in 2011. His latest release, *Ship To Shore*, finds him seeking inspiration from a diverse array of genres and styles. He looks back over his storied career so far and reveals why he has no interest in sitting on his laurels.

Words: Paul Sexton

From the very first mentions in the British music press of a young co-founder of Fairport Convention, Richard John Thompson was described as a teenage prodigy.

A summer 1968 reference to the Notting Hill native in *Beat Instrumental*, just after the release of the groundbreaking folk band's debut album, said the lead guitarist was "reckoned by many to be the best in the country" and that "with little apparent effort he will switch in a flash from rhythm chords to a searing, wholly-integrated solo". Soon that magazine's Rick Sanders (not to be confused with later Fairport member Ric) was stating that "at the age of 19, he's right up there with the heroes".

More than 55 years later, Thompson's status as one of the great players of his, or any generation has only become more exalted, not to mention his mastery of a distinctive and genre-blending style of song workmanship. The splendid, self-produced and characterful new *Ship To Shore* is the 20th solo album of a remarkable career that, after his 1971 departure from the Fairports for what even he regarded as an uncertain future, has logged countless landmarks.



New album Ship To Shore.

After 1972's debut in his own name with *Henry The Human Fly*, his personal and professional relationship with Linda Peters/Thompson rendered six Richard and Linda Thompson albums that joined the early Fairport releases as progressive benchmarks. Their acrimonious split in the early 1980s was happily followed by a musical reconciliation in the 2010s, as Richard continued to expand a vast songbook that combines acoustic and electric illustration of both traditional and modern-day ingredients.

He talks to *Prog* about the new album, his upbringing, the shadow still cast by the 1969 motorway accident that killed Fairport drummer Martin Lamble, and why stained glass manufacturing's loss was music's gain.

You've had to be very patient to be able to unveil the follow-up to *13 Rivers*, but it's been worth the wait for all of us.
I'm really excited to be back with the band, because I've been doing solo stuff since lockdown, just stuff online. It's been very frustrating, so it's wonderful to be back electric.

A very youthful Fairport Convention performing at a music festival in 1967.

MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES

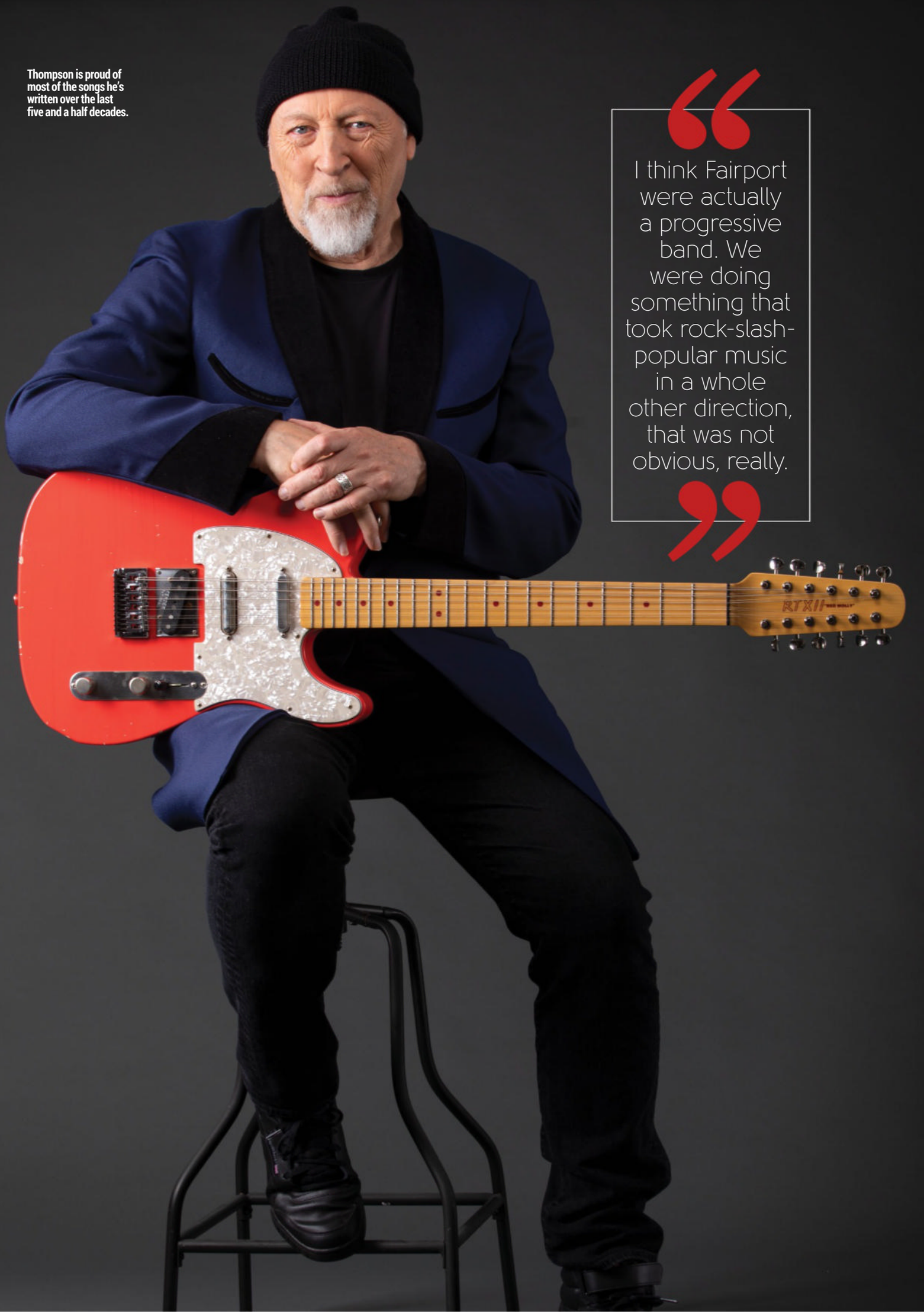
> "I find popular music of the last 20, 30 years not that interesting. So, I tend to go elsewhere for musical thrills."

This must be your longest ever gap between records by a mile?
Probably. When was the last one? 2018? Well, you know, that'll keep the audience hungry.

As always with you, even when there are certain tunes that seem very accessible, there's a wolf in sheep's clothing in terms of the lyrics, isn't there?
I don't know. I guess if I was writing pop songs, I wouldn't get quite so serious [laughs]. [Among] singer-songwriters as a genre, these days, it seems to me, there's a lot of people who get up in an open-mic [night] or a club or a theatre, and they just sing and write songs. It's kind of separate from playing traditional music, it's separate from popular music, really. I suppose I'm part of that genre. And you can write about just about anything. You don't have to keep it light. You can write about serious stuff that people deal with every day. If you're going to write a love song, write a *real* love song, write about sometimes how hard it is to achieve that. It gets mixed in with loss and jealousy and anxiety and all this stuff. You love people sometimes in spite of who they are.

FACING PAGE: PRESS/DAVID KAPTEIN

Richard Thompson still has plenty of wind in his sails.



Thompson is proud of most of the songs he's written over the last five and a half decades.

> I think Fairport were actually a progressive band. We were doing something that took rock-slash-popular music in a whole other direction, that was not obvious, really.

There are a lot of lyrics on *Ship To Shore* that will come under the general heading of the mysteries of love, like on *Trust*, for example, or mysterious women – *Singapore Sadie* has that flavour, doesn't it?
Yeah. Well, I think it was Freud, at the end of his life — might even have been on his deathbed — he said, "One thing I never understood was women." Come on, you're Sigmund Freud, you must have done better than that! And perhaps he was exaggerating, but aspects of women can be mysterious. I think men, psychologically and emotionally, are usually lagging behind. So I'm always trying to catch up.

Is *Singapore Sadie* about somebody you've come across in person?
Yeah, I mean that's a kind of a love song. It's a song about admiration of someone who actually goes through a lot of shit, certainly on a weekly basis, if not a daily basis, and comes out strong and smiling at the other end.

And it's got lyrical references in there to Marilyn Monroe and Betty Grable.
Yeah, that's about as up-to-date as I am in terms of pin-ups. Being in America, I think it comes from watching Turner Classic Movies most of the time. So my head's very much in the 1940s or 50s.

An unusual title almost certainly means an interesting song, and just one example of that is *Turnstile Casanova*, which is a great title and lyric.
Being around the music business and around musicians, you see people who get seduced by their own fame or their own reputation. When I was a teenager, I had a girlfriend who basically dumped me for somebody who was actually in the charts at that time. I shouldn't mention names, and I suppose this song is a very telescopic, long look back at that relationship.

Sometimes it takes 50, 60 years to decipher life, you know? I suppose if you're a songwriter, you have the advantage of trying to figure out the knots and complications in your life through song, and then you can lay it on other people [laughs] to their obvious discomfort.

Does that ever mean that if an old song crops up, or you hear it somewhere, there are times when you've thought, "I wouldn't express that thought that way now", or you've regretted the way you described something? Or do you just think of it as just being of its time?
Oh yeah, there's a lot of those. I sometimes think I could do a little rewrite or touch-up on about 300 songs. But is it worth it? And would people notice anyway? I'm quite proud of a lot of songs I've written. There's a good hundred songs that I think are actually really good. But there's other stuff where you're trying things out, and sometimes you succeed and sometimes you fail. I put those in the category of experimental. You go a little further than is comfortable or that you think the audience would actually like. Some of those songs, you look back and even a couple of years later and think, "That was a bit misguided." Or, "That's a very personal song," and people obviously don't get it, because nobody claps when you play it. So I'll keep it for myself. I'll sing it to myself in the bath or something.

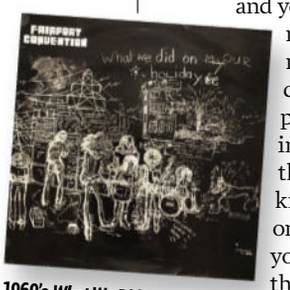
When a new song comes along, it must be quite hard to detach yourself from your own track record. Are you, maybe subconsciously, evaluating whether you think it stacks up against what you have done before?
Well, I think one of the ways that you test a song [is to] play it to people that you trust, first of all, you know, and that's not a bad idea. It's good to have people that aren't just gonna, you know, fawn over you and say, "Gosh, that's wonderful." They're actually going to say, "The third verse is a piece of shit, rewrite that."

If you don't have people like that, then the first time you play it in public is really revealing, because suddenly you hear it through other people's ears, and you can sense their reaction really, really closely. You can tell exactly what people are thinking in the room. And that's when you know if it's any good or not. Sometimes you play a song once, that's it, and you cringe onstage, but you feel a duty to actually finish the song. Then you think, I'll have to go away and rewrite that. But often you never do. Sometimes you put out a new album that you're very enthusiastic about every single track. And you realise after a year or two that you like only half of them. There's a few albums where I actually like almost every track. That's rare. Most albums in retrospect, I think, well, there's five or six good songs.

Which are the ones that you like all the way through?
I Want To See The Bright Lights Tonight, *Mock Tudor*, *13 Rivers*... and the new record, of course!

Is it too simplistic to think of *Meet On The Ledge* [from Fairport's second album, 1969's *What We Did On Our Holidays*] as the point where your songwriting came of age? We know you weren't too happy about the band having done so many covers before that.
Doing covers was our learning process. It made performers of us, but The Beatles writing their own material meant that to be valid in the eyes of the audience, we and everyone else had to write. The first Fairport album [1968's *Fairport Convention*] was us finding our feet as a band and as writers, and I co-wrote a few songs on that. *Meet On The Ledge* was my first solo effort, and it was enjoyable to think that I could do that, and that the

ESTATE OF KEITH MORRIS/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES
A striking pic from the *Morris On* LP cover shoot, L-R: Dave Mattacks, Barry Dransfield, Ashley Hutchings, John Kirkpatrick and Richard Thompson.



1969's *What We Did On Our Holidays*.

FACING PAGE: PRESS/DAVID KAPTEIN

result would be something that the band liked, and even recorded.

When you did your book [titled *Beeswing: Fairport, Folk Rock And Finding My Voice, 1967–75* in the UK] did you find there was a therapeutic element to it? Did you get a better understanding of yourself as a musician or a person?

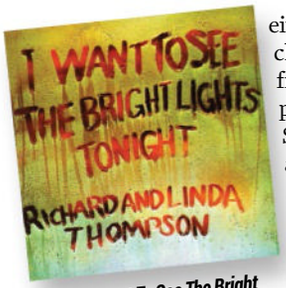
Yeah, I did actually. I'm not sure what I was expecting. But before I wrote it, I think I looked back selectively, to the nice bits, that I wanted, or I thought I wanted, to look at. But if you're doing a book, you have to be a bit more complete about it. You have to deal with the stuff you don't want to look at.

So, dealing with Fairport's accident and some childhood trauma, that stuff's still with me every day. And by writing about it in that way, it reminds you and I'm not sure it actually heals you, but it certainly makes you aware of who you are and why you do things. Why do I, you know, avoid confrontation, which I do a lot?

Richard has good memories of working with his then-wife Linda.

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

They say having an alcoholic parent can do that, which I did. And a fear of authority figures – although I'm older than most of the authority figures I meet! – I still kind of cringe when I meet them. I think again, that's having an authoritarian father. So these things are still with me and I deal with them, you know, and I overcome them eventually.



1974's *I Want To See The Bright Lights Tonight.*

The Fairport accident really derailed us. I've spoken to Simon [Nicol, vocals, guitars, keys] and Ashley [Hutchings, bass] about it, and I think it really traumatised us for a couple of years. We made bad decisions because we were just so out of our bodies, y'know, we were so upside down. But it's life and it's part of growing up, and if you don't experience that then what's the point, really?

The terrible memory of the accident will always be there, but are you able to look back on your time with Fairport with affection?

We were young, so everything was new and exciting. We were doing what we loved, and miraculously people listened, and we made a living. It was always a friendly band. In spite of hirings and firings, the Fairport family remained close.

Before Fairport, didn't you have a job with a stained glass company?

I worked for a stained glass artist, when I left school, a guy called Hans Unger, quite a well-known graphic designer and illustrator. He did a lot of posters for the London Underground, which are now like collector's pieces. And he did 'Post Early for Christmas', 'Keep Britain Tidy', all those kinds of things. So that was great fun, and he also did a lot of stained glass windows. We did a whole church up in Cheshire. I was there about six, maybe nine months, and basically all I did was make stained glass windows.

One of the nice things about that was that eight hours a day, seven days a week, they had either Radio 3 or classical records from the library playing, non-stop. So it was like a week of Wagner sometimes, or a real mixed diet of things. I learned a lot just keeping my ears open.

And that did seep into your style, didn't it?

I think it did, yes. If you want to improve yourself, sometimes, you go outside your genre, and you listen to jazz musicians or you just listen to classical musicians. Because the harmony is more sophisticated, so you can learn things. I've got no aspirations to play jazz or to play classical music, but I certainly pinch ideas from both. I probably listen mostly to classical music these days, just because I enjoy it the most. Opera, classical, great, and jazz from all eras. A lot of early jazz. I'm still listening to Louis Armstrong, Bix Beiderbecke, people like that, and, you know, Charlie Parker, Miles Davis and what have you. Because it's just a place to learn and it's enjoyable. At some point, I'd kind of heard most of what you can do with popular music, and I find popular music of the last 20, 30 years not that interesting. So, I tend to go elsewhere for musical thrills.

Some of the early references to Fairport in the music press are quite fun. In *Melody Maker*, some of the first were of you asking for gigs in the live pages. There's one where, among the ads for shows, you say, "Fairport are staying home again tonight, awaiting offers."

1972's *Henry The Human Fly.*

Yeah, that was our sort of cheeky way of trying to get some work. We put three ads in *Melody Maker* over different days. I think the last one was, "We've given up hope and we're off to the cinema." But that's where everybody found other musicians, and I think in 1969 that's how we found Dave Mattacks [drums]. In my book, I quote the classic *Melody Maker* ad, you know: "Wanted for [Chicken] Shack/Quo/Tull-style

> The Fairport accident really derailed us. I've spoken to Simon and Ashley about it, and I think it really traumatised us for a couple of years. We made bad decisions because we were just so out of our bodies, y'know, we were so upside down.

band. Hair/image essential. No jazzers. No time wasters. For a band going places." There are so many like that.

You left Fairport and made *Henry The Human Fly*. Had you intended to continue as a solo artist before you started recording as a duo with your then-wife Linda?
I had no solo ambition at that point. I figured I could continue to play in Sandy [Denny]'s band and Iain [Matthews]'s band and earn a living. Linda was shooting for a pop career, but I thought her manager was a bit lame. I thought playing as a duo around the folk clubs would be a living for a while, until we had a better plan, and we could spend more time together. Linda wasn't too enthusiastic – she'd done enough of that to know it could be relentless, but we gave it a shot.

And again, are there some good memories for you of those days working with Linda?
It was great fun. When we started a family, life got more complicated, but being young we could balance all that. We were a good duo, and had good material.

Do you find it amusing to be admired by modern-day prog fans?
I suppose there's different ways of looking at it. In the 70s, prog was a kind of dirty word. I never felt that much emotion coming from that music. Whereas now, I think Fairport were actually a progressive band. We were doing something that took rock-slash-popular music in a whole other direction, that was not obvious, really. Fairport were kind of unique in that way until Steeleye, the Albion Country Band, etc. But I think we were absolutely unique and groundbreaking, and if that isn't progressive, well, I don't know what is.

You like to record quickly, don't you? You tracked *Ship To Shore* in only five days, and mixed it in another four or so.
There are really smart people, of which I'm not one, who spend a lot longer making records. They'll record stuff, and then they'll go away and think about it, then they'll record more stuff. But I don't have the patience, you know, to spend that long on something. If I did, I would polish stuff a lot more, but then I don't really like polished records, so perhaps I should resign myself to a certain lack of success! Live, or as close to live as you can get, is always better, I think.

Have you become comfortable with producing yourself, as you do again on this record?
It comes and goes. I like the idea of having another set of ears on a project. It was fun to work with Jeff Tweedy [on *Still*] because he really brought something different, as did his studio.

It's fun to work with Buddy Miller [on *Electric*] because he records in his house, so that's got a whole different sound and attitude. It's a different kind of 'live', and a different kind of garage feel to it. But also from time to time, I do like to produce it myself because sometimes that's what I'm looking for. I'm looking for a more straightforward and honest version of me.

There are some artists who've been making records for a long time who, in recent years, seem to have taken the view that their audience doesn't really want new records any more.
But that's not you or your audience. It's a different mindset. There's a lot of bands from all decades I can think of who basically just repackage, and every time they do, they sell a lot of records. But there's not a lot new and the fanbase doesn't necessarily want anything new. I've really tried to educate my audience to expect, indeed to demand, material. So if I don't play anything new, I'm hoping that they'll be frustrated and say, "What's going on? You're slipping. You're sitting on your laurel. Singular." So I hope the audience drives me forwards.

Ship To Shore is out now via New West Records. See www.richardthompson-music.com for more information.

Definitely not resting on his singular laurel!

PRESS/DAVID KAPTEIN

Dave Mattacks, Dave Pegg, Richard Thompson, Chris Leslie and Simon Nicol recreate a 1970 photo at Fairport's Cropredy Convention on August 13, 2022.

STEVE THORNE/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

PENDRAGON

A kick up the 90s? Neo-prog torchbearers' standout album from the genre's anni horribiles gets a welcome reissue.

Words: Johnny Sharp **Illustration:** Mark Leary

If there was a year when prog reached its nadir of unfashionability, 1996 was it. Britpop was riding the zeitgeist, while the rock scene was still under the lingering influence of grunge, keeping rock on the straight and rather too narrow for music lovers with a penchant for something more expansive. Not that anybody had told Pendragon. As this reissue of the Gloucestershire proggers' fifth album *The Masquerade Overture* — now replete with gatefold vinyl packaging with leather effect finish, plus Simon Williams's intriguing artwork presented on card sleeve inserts — reminds us, there were some UK acts keeping the home fires burning very effectively.

Not that the uninitiated would have realised at the time from the airplay, industry support and media coverage — or lack of it. The neo-prog movement of the early 80s that originally spawned Pendragon was a distant memory, with even Marillion struggling after parting company with EMI. But over in Stroud, singer-guitarist Nick Barrett and keyboard maestro Clive Nolan had found fresh impetus, making records on their own label Toff, and enjoying enough success to not just survive but expand their fanbase by touring across Europe. *The Masquerade Overture* would go on to sell over 90,000 copies, making them one of the era's biggest independent prog acts.

It was the result of Pendragon moving away from the keyboard-heavy soft rock sound they'd dabbled with in the late 80s and returning to their first love: long-form compositions, conceptual narratives and colourful, fantasy-leaning imagery. It didn't hurt that Barrett seemed to be a late bloomer as a songwriter, with 1991's *The World* and 1993's *The Window Of Life* cementing a strong new identity. But it was this 1996 release that would come to compete with its successor in their catalogue, 2001 release *Not Of This World*, as a fan favourite.

Any newcomers to the band's music won't take long to understand this record's cherished status, as alluring melodic flourishes and emotive hooks beckon the listener into the first third of the album. The title track introduces the central concept, touching on how music can allow a social outsider to create new identities, explore fantasies and open up new worlds for themselves and their listeners. The foreshadowing of musical figures that will feature later are dripped into this introductory piece, before a full-blown operatic choir offers grandiose promises of what's to come. One to turn up loud. *As Good As Gold* follows, with Barrett sensing, *'I open my eyes and look up to the skies and I dream... dream that a new life will be born.'* Nolan's synth flourishes sound like trumpet fanfares and the guitar lines whizz overhead like a Red Arrows display. Nonetheless, a struggle against the odds is evidently in store as we're told the protagonist is *'fighting the laws of gravity'*. Equally stirring is the more plaintive picture created by *Paintbox*: *'I paint the path I want to take and paint a life of fire,'* our hero sings, as if referring to his own determination to go the artist's way.

While the primary musical textures recall classic prog — from fizzing, florid synth decoration to skyscraping fretwork redolent of Gilmour, Latimer and Rothery — they are employed with sufficient skill to avoid sounding derivative. Meanwhile, there's always room for less conventional sounds, such as the penny whistle that accompanies *The Pursuit Of Excellence* and its romantic vision of previous generations sailing to America to pursue their own dreams.

Inevitably, there are stormy narrative waters to navigate, as found in the latter parts of *Guardian Of My Soul*, where *'The demons wake while the mannequin sleeps/And I pray the Lord my soul to keep,'* and we find *'The Whore Of Babylon waiting in a doorway/To mug you and your pride.'* There's light at the end of that tunnel, though, as *Masters Of Illusion* ends the original album with a defiant statement: *'I'm the master of illusion, a master of disguise/and you won't fear the world anymore...'*

The first of two bonus tracks on this reissue is the seven-minute *Schizo*, another anthemic affair. *'Mindblown and schizo, that's where we are,'* goes the chorus. *'Climbing hills and popping the pills, has it come this far?'* Gospel-ish backing vocals ease the uncertainty before Barrett drifts away onto the horizon of a yearning guitar solo. It's followed by *King Of The Castle*, whose chorus is drawn from the climactic sections of *The Shadow* on the original LP. Yet here it works as an exploration around that focal point, accompanied by elegant strings and acoustic guitars.

The fact that it's reprising a key passage from earlier in the set also ensures the whole affair retains a sense of the story coming to a natural conclusion, as Barrett concludes: *'Free spirit I've travelled, so follow me now.'* Long may he roam.

The Masquerade Overture

TOFF

> **A reminder there were prog acts keeping the home fires burning.**

AIRBAG

The Century Of The Self KARISMA

Norse prog notables expand their sonic environment.

Leading lights of the Norwegian progressive rock scene for more than 15 years, Airbag have always had a clear identity. Across their five studio albums to date, their subtly unique strain of post-Floyd melancholy has certainly proved itself to be a malleable thing.

Their 2013 album *The Greatest Show On Earth* saw Airbag perfect their sound, and every subsequent album has brought new dimensions and textures to the tearful party, while also

> **They sound liberated by the sheer enormity of space in their songs.**

retaining the essence of their trademark dreamy drift. From the darkly digital paranoia-fest of 2016's *Disconnected* to the back-to-basics sumptuousness of 2020's *A Day At The Beach*, they have all contributed to a sense that Airbag could tinker at the edges of their sound forever and a day, without ever sacrificing the unfussy, humble power that lies at its heart.

That remains largely true here. *The Century Of The Self* offers no radical departures or jarring detours, and with the disarming vocal presence of frontman Asle Tostrup dominating the foreground, these songs should slot neatly into the Airbag catalogue. Nonetheless, this is a very different record from its predecessors, if only in sonic terms. Blurring the lines between traditional prog, its modern equivalent and, more surprisingly, mind-expanding space rock, opening epic *Dysphoria* highlights the new dynamic sensibilities that inform this record. Built on a languid groove, it has much in common with the somnambulant stoner ritualism of bands like King Buffalo and OM, quasi-dub bass line included; but with the expected, bittersweet melodic thrust of the modern prog set, and a slight edge of post-punk grubbiness thrown in.

Where previous albums favoured a more conservative quiet-to-loud aesthetic, here Airbag sound liberated by the sheer enormity of space that their songs have wandered into. On the tense but tumultuous *Tyrants And Kings*, the backdrop for Tostrup's pleas for mercy echoes the kohl-eyed vastness of The Cure's *Disintegration*, elevating an otherwise straightforward song to a higher level of atmospheric potency. On the gently heart-breaking *Awakening*, as Tostrup sings, *'Don't look down/Keep your head up...'*, the background is a masterclass in minimalist elegance, with only drums and strummed acoustic providing an anchor to reality, as Riis wrings slender shards of bluesy wistfulness from his instrument.

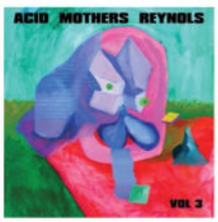
The closing *Tear It Down* embraces Airbag's newly expansive sonic environs, veering from stripped-down finesse to churning, angular alt rock, and spiralling towards massive, post-rock crescendos. The *Century Of The Self* is a subtle but effective sideways step.

DOM LAWSON

ACID MOTHERS REYNOLS

Volume 3 VHF

A self-indulgent nightmare that leads to a bad trip.



Collaborations between the more outré of bands always raise the prospect of more bang for one's buck. The union of Sunn O))) and Ulver produced Satan's own ambient music in the shape of *Terrestrials* or the psychedelic onslaught that wrought by the collision of Manchester's Gnod and New York space-rockers White Hills on *Dropout With White Hills II*.

Then there are the two albums released by Acid Mothers Reynols, the fusion of Japan's third-eye rinsers Acid Mothers Temple and Argentinian experimentalists Reynols. While those two releases, *Volume 1* and *Volume 2*, were challenging experiences, there was always a hook to hang a coat on. Unfortunately, this third volume removes not just the hook but also the load-bearing wall that it was nailed to.

The pile of rubble left behind makes for a frustrating search for satisfaction. Across its four tracks, there's a feeling that the musicians were far more interested in satisfying themselves than anybody else. The meandering *Kicking Air Breaks* recalls the climax of Laurel & Hardy's *The Music Box* while titles such as *Multiverse Turtle Reflex* prove more interesting than their contents. **JM**

AGE OF DISTRACTION

A Game Of Whispers AGEOFDISTRACTION.BANDCAMP.COM

Ex-This Winter Machine guitarist melds neo-prog and metal on new project.

Guitarist John Cook stepped down from This Winter Machine to embark on a solo project where he could explore styles that wouldn't have fitted into the Yorkshire outfit's canon. However, after enlisting Ghost Of The Machine vocalist Charlie Bramald for a guest spot, said project quickly transformed into a band proper, Age Of Distraction.

With assistance from Hats Off Gentlemen It's Adequate bassist Mark Gatland and This Winter Machine drummer Dom Benison, Age Of Distraction have delivered a texturally rich concept record which draws on a multitude of styles. On *Break My Bones* they strike a balance between popping neo-prog colours and metallic gumption, *Compromised* remains accessible despite its snarling delivery, while *Sneak Attack* finds Bramald providing light to its contorting instrumental darkness, and Cook's fretboard burning solo. The lyrical theme of toxic relationships threads through the record, notably on the sparse, acoustic-led *Oceans* and the string-lavished *Take Me Down*, the latter courtesy of Stuckfish's Phil Stuckey. A diverse and enjoying opening salvo. **POW**

ALCEST

Les Chants De L'Aurore NUCLEAR BLAST

French visionaries continue to sew together a multitude of genres to phenomenal effect.

The seventh album from Alcest, their first new music since 2019's *Spiritual Instinct* sees the French duo continuing to push their experimental blend of shoegaze, black metal and dream pop with progressive components, blurring genres with little regard for traditional boundaries.

The black metal aspect of Alcest's sound is more muted here, making it one of their most accessible records yet. *Komorebi* opens the album with an atmospheric intro before crashing drums contrast starkly against founder/multi-instrumentalist Neige's soft, lilting vocals. Their heavier elements appear most prominently in *Améthyste*, whose thunderous racket settles into an eerie drone, where melodic guitars and soft vocals broaden Alcest's musical spectrum.

Neige states that the intention of the record is to spread "hope" in a time of negativity. Certainly, when *L'Envol* and *Flamme Jumelle* intertwine floating tremolos and soft, ballad-esque vocals with the harsher strands of their sound such as rapturous drums and snarled shouts, the result is an aura of positivity that remains infectious long beyond the final notes of *Les Chants De L'Aurore*. **CF**

ALWANZATAR

Engsyre APOLLON

Eccentric Norwegian electronic adventurer visits the faery folk on sixth album.

Kristoffer Momrak describes the sound of his one-man-band Alwanzatar as "extraterrestrial world music", and it's an appropriate description for *Engsyre*, which could have been made on a spaceship.

Alwanzatar abducts disparate sounds from various regions and eras and hashes them together in otherworldly experiments, with moments of musical nirvana feeling as though they were generated more by chance than design. On *Høymole*, 90s acid-rave squelches are pressed together with Berber horn ululations and the distinctive tweeting of birds; *Tårnhode Med Skyer* follows similar terrain with added flute to radiate early Kraftwerk vibes. *Fjerdingby Filterbattle* flirts with dub, *Khan Krums Horn* slips in some traditional Chinese music, and so on. It's an unpredictable concoction, inspiring euphoria one moment and disquiet the next.

The title comes from the Norwegian name for sorrel, with Momrak – who also plays in Tusmørke – promising to take the listener away from the city to find "the faery folk" hiding in the forest. *Engsyre* is potent in its originality, though sometimes it's hard to see the wood for the trees. **JA**

ANTA

Organesson STOLEN BODY RECORDS

Bristol psych rockers get loose on album four.

There's plenty of crunch in the fourth album from Bristolian quartet Anta, with the foursome swapping the more polished production of 2021's *Church Of The Second Sun* for a rawer, rougher vibe. The group sound strongest when at their most expansive and it's the two longer pieces that bookend the album, *QTFK* and the title track, that are the most compelling.

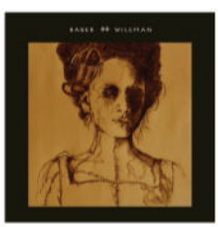
QTFK is a thrillingly chaotic psych workout, with Alex Bertram-Powell's organ growling opposite Ben Harris's twisting, cyclonic guitar lines. At their heaviest, drummer James King and bassist Joe Garcia bring an almost doomy intensity to the track, which shapeshifts as it plunges onwards. By contrast, *Artus Telem* is built around a mournful, chanted dirge. It's a mood piece more than a song.

Voxel has more energy, but similarly has trouble moving beyond the limits of Harris's guitar ostinato, only really opening up in the outro. Happily, the title track is another bumpy ride into the great unknown, moving from drifting space rock into a churning cosmic storm with the band flowing from one idea to the next. Those moments exemplify the thrill of relinquishing control and just letting loose. **DW**

MATT BABER & RICHARD WILEMAN

Baber/Wileman 2 BELIEVERS ROAST

Post-rock, classical and more from impressive British duo.



Well, this is rather gorgeous. While the second collaboration from Sanguine Hum's Matt Baber and Richard Wileman of Karda Estra is a predominantly instrumental affair, it's an album of multifarious moods and colours. The vocal-led *Grindhouse Dreamer* leans towards the folky, Canterbury school of prog, and while *Villagers* begins in the same mode, it expands into undulating synth soundscapes and Baber's tasteful, inventive drumming.

The Coming Storm expertly evokes the slow-building tension of dark clouds rolling over the horizon, with a piano line moving over ephemeral, shifting ambient waves. Clarinetist Amy Fry appears on three tracks, moving the music towards contemporary classical in the nimble melodies of *2005 Part 1*, or enriching the jazz meets post-rock of *2005 Part 5*.

The album bears eloquent testament to what independent artists can achieve in production terms. The sound is lush and vibrant, from the sparkling piano in the Phillip Glass sparseness of *Memory No.3* to the deep bass of the Floyd-like *Territories Of The Undead*. A feast for the ears, hopefully there's more where this came from. **DW**

LOUISE PATRICIA CRANE

Netherworld PECULIAR DOLL

Northern Irish songwriter returns in a romantic mood.

Four years on from her debut album *Deep Blue*, Louise Patricia Crane undertakes a musical metamorphosis. It seems a little early in the singer and multi-instrumentalist's career for the artist to be reinventing herself, but *Netherworld* is a marked stylistic departure from its predecessor, swapping the alternative rock vibe of *Deep Blue* for a sound that draws more from celtic folk and Kate Bush's idiosyncratic school of art-rock and prog.

> **It draws from Kate Bush's idiosyncratic school of art-rock.**

The album is produced by Crane and King Crimson's Jakko Jakszyk, who also contributes guitar. While the celtic influences can be heard in the fiddle and uillean pipes of the opening track *Dance With The Devil*, Jakszyk's electric lead guitar-work maintains a connection to the world of prog rock. In a similar folky vein, *Tiny Bard* is a whimsical folk song inspired by Crane's pet cat Bosco, enlivened by guest star Ian Anderson's playful fluting.

Although it feels like the obvious choice to compare Crane to Kate Bush, it's hard to resist that impulse when her intimate, breathy vocals on *Spirit Of The Forest* and *Toil And Trouble* recall Bush circa *The Sensual World*. What is surprising is how low Crane's voice often sits in the mix. In *Celestial Dust* she's in danger of fading into the background and the singer is a strangely distant, remote figure in *Little Ghost In The Room*. There's a school of singing where the voice is treated as an instrument, one facet of the musical landscape rather than the centrepiece, but that doesn't seem to be the intended aesthetic here. Instead, it feels like the vocals have been allowed to slip below the horizon in the mixing and mastering process.

A second apparent influence from Bush is in the avoidance of conventional drum grooves. Gary Husband handles the drumming with restraint and refinement, steering away from any kind of backbeat in favour of a more melodic approach to the rhythm section. With a line-up of players that includes Nick Beggs and Tony Levin on bass, saxophonist Mel Collins, and violinist Shir-Ran Yinon, the musicianship is consistently excellent.

The songwriting is somewhat less even. *Bête Noire* and *Thieves Fools And Crows* feel somewhat insubstantial, lacking a clearly articulated melody. *Long Kiss Goodnight* has more mood and atmosphere than songcraft and the absence of hooks is exacerbated when Crane's voice is reduced to an ephemeral presence drifting in and out of the music like a breeze through an open window. *Netherworld* captures Crane's artistic evolution and the music is loaded with romance, albeit occasionally hamstrung by the frustrating mix.

DAVID WEST

FOCUS

Focus 12 SPIRIT OF UNICORN MUSIC

Dutch masters deliver trustworthy tropes.

The indefatigable Focus continue to craft effective prog-friendly instrumentals, 55 years on from their formation. There have been stoppages and reunions across that time, and founder member Thijs Van Leer now leads a quartet including long-term drummer Pierre van der Linden, guitarist Menno Gootjes (a contributor since the 90s) and bassist Udo Pannekeet (a mere eight years in the saddle).

> **Its organic warmth gives off its own charisma.**

While the latter pair produced this 12th studio album, it's very much Van Leer's baby. His keyboards and flute are all over these pieces like white on rice. Since Jan Akkerman's departure after their unlikely commercial heyday had faded, Focus has been his ship to steer. The 75-year-old orchestrates two modes here: there are impish flurries full of switchback changes, which offer pass-the-parcel ascendancy to guitar riffs or keyboard curveballs or flute warbles, and there are quiet, piano-led meditations.

The album plainly lacks the scale and presence of a *Moving Waves* or *Hamburger Concerto*; it seems content to keep its ambitions moderate. Yet there's a charm to that. Indisputably dated as it is, lacking any interest in developments in, say, electronica, its organic warmth gives off its own charisma. A hint of the yodelling weirdness of *Hocus Pocus* or the deceptive drive of *Sylvia* might have pepped up the project, but its relaxedness tips over into a form of robustness. Focus reckon it would be needy to try too hard, and so don't.

Fjord Focus is a fine example of their current ease of movement. It kicks happily into jazz fusion, with Gootjes getting plenty of dextrous exercise. *All Aboard*, guided by a mischievous bass line, is breezy and bright, like something holidaying from a Weather Report album. At least until everyone yields the floor to a grinding guitar section, which is as explicit a nod as the record gives to "classic-era Focus". There's a greater emphasis on inherent lilt and sway in the confusingly-named *Focus 13*, where it's lighters aloft until a closing squall of volume and energy. And the captivating *Meta Indefinata* floats elegantly in an ambient zone which evokes Peter Green playing with Stanley Clarke.

The more muted, reflective Van Leer piano pieces require patience from the listener, but suggest he's been getting into Chopin. *Born To Be With You* is almost too overtly melancholy to support its own weight. Then there's *Bowie*, the title of which inevitably raises the question of whether it's a homage to Rick Wakeman's playing on *Life On Mars?* With a Roger Dean sleeve and an abundance of retro allure, *Focus 12* is a dependable dozenth.

CHRIS ROBERTS

BILLY MAHONIE

Field Of Heads WHISTLING SAM PROJECTS

Triumphant return of post-rock pioneers.

Billy Mahonie – a band, not a person – came to prominence in the late 90s, touted as London's answer to Mogwai. It was a compelling but misleading, comparison. Both bands pioneered a version of instrumental post-rock that blended melodic dynamics with head-spinning riffage, but whereas Mogwai often favoured a wall-of-noise attack, Billy Mahonie took a more organic approach, a sinuous weaveworld of dual guitars against tightly coiled rhythms.

Their first release in 14 years, *Field Of Heads* is an absolute joy, picking up where they left off from their superb second album, *What Becomes Before*. *Atomic Clock* illustrates the band's conversational arrangements, the guitars' reflective small talk developing into a harder-edged argument, the opposite of the math-like calculations of much modern post-rock. The urgent, chopped riff of *Kaiju* is utterly without flab or faff, while *Hearts Vs Minds* highlights the delicacy at the heart of what they do. The sombre arpeggio and spare piano of *Spy Guy* builds to a screeching, scrambling guitar solo, and the bass-led strut of *Dry Season* sizzles with drama. It's good to have them back. **JB**

CAN

Live In Aston 1977 MUTE/FUTURE DAYS

Late-period live recording shines new light on received wisdom.

It wasn't a lack of ideas that helped bring Can to a close at the end of the 70s, but the onset of technology. By embracing multitrack recording, the spontaneity that beat at their very heart was gradually replaced by a planned course of action in the studio, a move that resulted not only in a cleaner sound on their final albums, but also in a line-up shift that saw the arrival of ex-Traffic bassist Rosko Gee, replacing Holger Czukay.

This shift is palpable throughout this, the latest in the series of unearthed live recordings from the kosmische pioneers. Across its three tracks, Can sound less wayward, and more streamlined and dead ahead. Guitarist Michael Karoli and keyboardist Irmin Schmidt are front and centre throughout with Gee providing more of an anchor along with Jaki Liebezeit's drumming.

Aston 77 Zwei takes root in 1972's *Vitamin C*, but sets off on a circuitous route that relies less on its groove based origins. Elsewhere, Karoli's sustained guitar and Schmidt's funky interventions lock in on the epic *Aston 77 Eins*, proving that, despite their studio modifications, Can could still summon up their unique alchemy. **JM**

COMA ROSSI

Void COMAROSSIMUSIC.BANDCAMP.COM

Spacey but hard-edged trip beyond the void.

Coma Rossi belatedly follow up their 2018 debut with a refining of their widescreen, ethereal soundscape. *Void* sits somewhere between Sigur Rós or Porcupine Tree in its echoing, keening breadth, metal dynamics and lingering guitars. But there's more in the mix, including a dollop of the moodier end of early 90s alt/desert rock and a hard-edged shoegaziness.

Highlights include the mournful *Falling Apart*, which begins with gentle acoustics and enigmatic mumbling, before hitting the button marked 'Mogwai-style overdrive'. The disorientating screech and drone sections of the nine-minute *This Red Sky* alternate with heavy passages featuring a guitar apparently played by a rivet-punching machine, before moving into celestial synth patterns. The space rock of *Farm Of Lights* features an unsettling, baritone wailing that sounds like an obscure and sinister ritual, before *In Circles* closes the album with a contemplative piano figure that builds into another guitar-heavy interstellar meditation.

Those who enjoy their chill-out with a side order of thrill and a proggy sensibility should dive into this void. **PGI**

CUSTARD FLUX

Einsteinium Delirium FRIENDS OF THE FISH

Detroit psych proggers get unsettled on this nuclear weapon/anti-war concept LP.

He's fond of a theme, is Detroit psych master Gregory Curvey. From the unplugged Harmonium joy of 2018's *Helium* to 2020's Covid-inspired tribute to loss, *Oxygen*, and the man-in-a-sports-car emancipation of 2021's *Phosphorous*, Custard Flux's mainman puts content *with* style to create some of the greatest psych pop in operation right now.

For album five, his mind turned to nuclear arms use as he fell down a rabbit hole of research into the state of the nuke nation today. Given that, *Einsteinium Delirium* – a nod to the debris left by the hydrogen bomb – is understandably serious and is the most pessimistic the Flux have ever sounded, from the Mellotron-buoyed *Peace And Love* to the poignant *Kingdom Come*, the impassioned acid-rock dirge *Time For Me To Go* and the cantilever instrumental *Fat Man*.

There are still some kick-ass, electric moments such as the XTC bop of *Burning In The Sun*, the superb, skronky avant-garde guitar on *Open Wide* and the off-kilter swing of *Right Now Here In Time*. But *Einsteinium...* demands action over love beads and flowers, reflecting the new atomic age and continuing need for CND. **JK**

BILL FISHER

How To Think Like A Billionaire SEPTAPHONIC

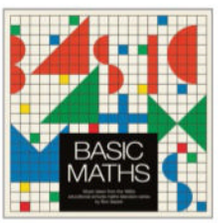
Church Of The Cosmic Skull man takes a voyage on the seas of prog and yacht rock.

Best known as the brains behind retro prog rockers Church of The Cosmic Skull, on his third solo album Fisher frequently sounds like he's creating the natural successor to Beach Boy Dennis Wilson's sole solo album, 1977's near-exquisite *Pacific Ocean Blue*. If you agree with the late John Wetton, who always said his favourite prog album was the Beach Boys' *Surf's Up*, this will probably come as thrilling news. If you're a dyed-in-the-wool purist, possibly not. However over the course of the next eight tracks Fisher totally succeeds in his mission to deliver a record that sounds as if "Kate Bush and Michael McDonald wrote a yacht doom album." Dripping in Yamaha PSR-8000 tones and Fisher's McDonald-meets-Wilson voice, songs like the excellent *Overview Effect*, *Ride On*, *Unicorn* and *Consume The Heart* are all way more prog than doom. Indeed, only the single *Yell Of The Ringman* offers the kind of power chords reminiscent of the day job. Better still, he does it all while taking potshots at the ridiculously phallic space-race beloved of the likes of Musk, Bezos and Branson. So, there you have it: yacht prog is now a thing. What a guy! **JE**

RON GEESIN

Basic Maths TRUNK RECORDS

One-time Floyd collaborator's electronic vignettes for educational 80s kids TV show.



Finally released commercially some 44 years after he wrote it, Ron Geesin's electronic soundtrack to 1980 educational show *Basic Maths* is infected with a dopamine hysteria that shows his roots in Dixieland jazz and electronica, but doesn't quite reach the mayhem of that year's *Enterbrain Exit* from the *Miniatures* compilation.

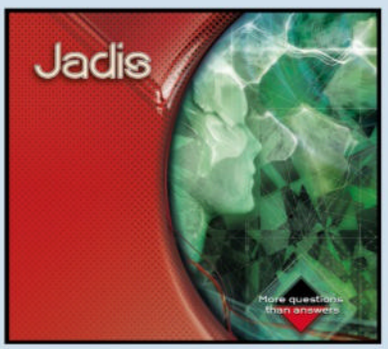
Geesin's then-new toy was an Oberheim eight-voice synthesiser, and Geesin tells this writer that it was "supplemented by my already well-oiled palette of piano, banjos, guitars, mouth organ, percussion and voice" alongside his old faithful, the Synthi. He's a playful composer and sound designer, employing an array of moods. For every jaunty *Fair By The Sea* there's the gorgeous, folky *Soft Mirrors*, or the Radiophonic Workshop/*Blake's 7* klang of *Colossal Triangle Split*, and even some Kraftwerk in *Numbered Rows* or *Unitary Climb*.

The compositions are even more entertaining when allied to visuals (sadly there's no DVD, so do visit YouTube), but for collectors of Geesin's library work, with a fondness for 1988's *Marvellous Machines*, *Basic Maths* is an attractive, er, addition. **JK**

JADIS

More Questions Than Answers JADISMUSIC.COM

Neo-prog veterans rouse from their slumber with satisfying return.



Staples of the rebirth of prog during the 1980s, Jadis do things in their own dignified and unhurried way. Notwithstanding a 2017 25th-anniversary reboot of one of neo-prog's most perfect albums, *More Than Meets The Eye*, and also a couple of compilations, *More Questions Than Answers* is the first release from this Southampton-based outfit in a whopping eight years.

> **A charming album that's easy to listen to and easier to enjoy.**

No matter. We can pretty much guess what it will sound like anyway, and please don't interpret that statement as a criticism. In these days of super-fast broadband, Auto-Tune and AI-assisted creativity, the question of why Jadis required the best part of a decade to write and record a little over 50 minutes of music is unavoidable. The only possible response is: just play the bloody album and for God's sake stop over-thinking things. More questions than answers, indeed.

How pleasing to report that Martin Orford, the celebrated keyboard player who back in 2008 'retired' from the industry for reasons that were universally understood and sympathised with, steps back into the limelight, temporarily at least. The IQ/John Wetton stalwart adds keys and flute, as well as contributing backing vocals. Guitarist and singer Gary Chandler reveals that Martin was "enthusiastic" during the sessions, in addition to writing "a lot" of the music.

Melody and airiness are as fundamental to musicianship over these seven consistently strong tunes. When it comes to duration, clocking in at an average of seven minutes long, they offer a satisfying blend of artistic eloquence and (relative) immediacy. *Said And Done* quickly sets the scene, Chandler's wonderfully expressive guitar operating in glorious tandem with a deep, fruity accompaniment from Orford. *Wood Between The Worlds* and the more concise *Everything We See* both continue to elevate the mood before we reach the album's epic piece. Over the course of almost 11 minutes, *Do You Know* begins in an almost madrigal style, seemingly pointing an accusing finger at the authority figures that shape our lives, before instruments and amplifiers are turned up and shackles unleashed.

How best to follow that but with the album's most succinct track, a shimmering pop-laden ditty entitled *Questions Without Answers*. Packed full of swagger and smiles, *From All Sides* is a reminder that Jadis are no mere musical lightweights, and the band wrap things up with *Fading Truth*, as rewarding an album closer as can be expected.

Mastered by the ubiquitous John Mitchell, *More Questions Than Answers* is a charming album that's easy to listen to, and simpler still to enjoy.

DAVE LING

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GRAHAM GOULDMAN

I Have Notes LOJINX

Esteemed songsmith has stars queuing up to cameo.

With a guest list including Ringo Starr, Brian May, Hank Marvin and Albert Lee, Graham Gouldman's sixth solo album isn't short on talking points. Its superpower, of course, is his songwriting, which, in the 58 years since his first single, remains undiminished. Gouldman loves to keep busy, touring both solo and with the current incarnation of 10cc and, as the upbeat *We're Alive* insists, seizing the day is paramount, even if the rallying cry to *'wind up the gramophone'* winks at the self-effacing humour 10cc so often exhibited. Indeed, a "lost" Gouldman composition for a 10cc demo, *I'm Lazy*, is re-recorded, and while it's no *Lazy Ways*, it's true to the band's spirit.

Elsewhere, May plays guitar on the pretty *Floating In Heaven*, and *When You Find Love* allows sincerity to trump sarcasm. The trap of silliness is tumbled into on *Play Me (The Ukulele Song)* and a bizarre Christmas tune, but *Couldn't Love You More* restores order. Starr's relaxed yet very present drumming could only be him. The instrumental *Celestial Light*, which Gouldman said was inspired by Debussy and Vaughan Williams, confirms his nimble versatility. More than a grace note. **CR**

HAUNTED PLASMA

I SVART

Finnish synth rock eccentrics get psyched.

The synthesiser has once more become ubiquitous in music, but few have used it with such disorientating intent as Haunted Plasma. With members of blackened space rockers Oranssi Pazuzu and eccentric electronic enigmas K-X-P on board, informed observers could reasonably expect something wild and weird from this project.

I plunders from the dark side of industrial and post-punk, but soars off into psychedelic realms, surfing on thick, coagulant waves of old school synth. At times, Haunted Plasma come close to skull-rattling krautrock fervour. *Machines Like Us* hinges on a fidgeting, synthetic beat, while finding space for tripped-out, twangy guitar and the hypnotic vocals of Hexvessel's Mat McNerney. *Spectral Embrace* is a recurring nightmare in musical form, with a lurching rhythm, blank-eyed proclamations and a dramatic chordal payoff. A glacial dirge that sleepwalks through a dense fog of reverb and fractious tech, *Echoes* is even more peculiar; while closer *Haunted Plasma* offers 12 delirious minutes of mutant motorik. For those who enjoy the occasional mind-expanding trip, this is mad-eyed, mandatory listening. **DL**

RICHARD HENSHALL

Mu Vol.1 RICHARDHENSHALL.BANDCAMP.COM

Haken guitarist embarks on a jazzy new voyage.

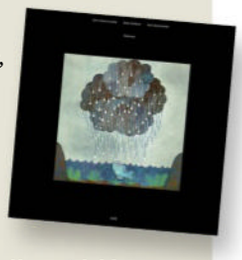
As Haken's guitarist, Richard Henshall has established himself as an inventive and obscenely talented musician with no shortage of ideas at his disposal. Here, he embarks on a planned series of EPs, which seek to explore the outer limits of instrumental guitar music, while poking at the boundaries between prog and jazz fusion. Accompanied by drummer Lang Zhao and saxophonist Adam Carillio, Henshall is on spectacular form, as these four songs showcase the breadth and depth of his musical vocabulary.

Yang is the most familiar piece here, with its jittery, tech-metal grooves, bursts of shoegazing grandeur and Henshall's precise but deceptively wonky soloing. No idea is given the chance to outstay its welcome, as the song takes a meandering route toward its skewed endgame. Similarly mischievous, *Granular* skitters and sparkles over stuttering beats, as Henshall conjures gorgeously lyrical flurries of notes, veers off on minimalist tangents and weaves downbeat melodies into an otherwise joyously complex sprawl. In contrast, *Land Aliens* is a languid piece of graceful post-rock, while the closing *Mu* is a multifaceted, fusion-fuelled riot. **DL**

JAZZ PROG

Sid Smith rounds up the best releases from prog's jazzier reaches.

ECM Records' *Luminescence* series continues to delight with another vintage selection that deftly illustrates why the label founded by Manfred Eicher in 1969 has been so hugely important in developing contemporary jazz's emotional vocabulary. Originally released in 1975, **John Abercrombie, Dave Holland and Jack Dejohnette**'s *Gateway*'s joyful interplay between Abercrombie's serpentine guitar, Dejohnette's sprightly drums and Holland's earthy bass remains just as vital and engaging today as it did nearly half a century ago. Abercrombie, who died in 2017, wields raw tones and subtle colours against the receptive backdrop weaved by his colleagues. The conversational album trades wry flashes of boppish blues, explosive Mahavishnu-style rock-outs, and thrillingly intricate flurries as they plunge into their pooled ideas.



Jon Durant's *Momentarily* (Alchemy Records) finds the American guitarist in the company of Swiss percussion ace Andi Pupato and ex-Porcupine Tree bassist Colin Edwin for a beguiling sequence of reflective exchanges. Durant's fluid playing dominates the hushed mood. Wreathed in a swirl of reverb and sometimes sounding like a mournful voice lamenting the world's sorrows, it nestles into compositions as though blown in on the wind. Pupato's evocative metallic percussion, a notable feature of his work in Nik Bärtsch's Ronin, deepens the sepulchral lustre.

Recorded during 2021 over two days, *Shiver Meets Matthew Bourne Volume 2* (Discus Records) does what it says on the tin as pianist Bourne locks musical horns with the guitar, bass, and drums of UK improv legends Shiver. Together they produce rivetingly creative sparks as Bourne's knotty clusters mesh with Shiver's distorted electronics-enhanced timbre, rippling with urgent, stuttering guitar with all of it morphed in a real-time blender. The roiling kinetic rush of exploratory interaction constantly pushes against cliché and habit, frequently bursting into gleaming, transcendent passages. Companion release *Volume 1* from 2023 is also highly recommended.

It's six years since Norwegian trio **Splashgirl**'s last album, so *More Human* by Splashgirl & Robert Aiki Aubrey Lowe (Hubro) is very welcome indeed. American composer and sound artist Lowe adds subtle electronica and occasional murky vocalising. Even without the inclusion of a cover of Talk Talk's *Taphead*, the mellifluous church organ burbling between surges of brushed cymbal, resonating acoustic bass figures, whispering electronics, and thin harmonic overtones that glisten with atmospherics and melody across the album are more than enough to make connections with Mark Hollis's introspective visions.

Finally, vibrant Swedish quartet **Sol Sol**'s *Almost All Things Considered* (Sail Cabin Records) showcases composer and sometimes Fire! member Elin Forkelid's robust Colemanesque sax formidably underpinned by Anna Lund's stormy drumming. Guitarist David Stackenäs's high-wire soloing seals the deal on a passionate, irresistible set.

KAIPA

Sommargryningsljus INSIDEOUTMUSIC

Swedish prog luminaries provide nourishing light in the darkness.

Led today by keyboard player and sole remaining founder member Hans Lundin, Swedish symphonic prog exponents Kaipa have a venerable history. With five albums released between 1975 and 1982 (the first three featuring 17-year-old future Flower Kings frontman Roine Stolt on guitar), a two-decade hiatus and nine subsequent albums since 2002, they are a Scandi-prog institution.

> **It captures the majesty of classic symphonic prog.**

Kaipa's latest, *Sommargryningsljus* ('Summer Dawn Light'), is themed around the concept of a nocturnal odyssey from fading light to redemptive dawn. It starts as the day ends with *Sommarskymningsljus*, actually the first part of one song that bookends the album, with vocalist Aleena Gibson gently emoting as she reflects on the dying of the day. Both Gibson and her partner-in-voice, Patrik Lundström, are outstanding throughout this record, channelling the shifting moods and character of the music – there's a dark vulnerability in Lundström's delivery during *Chased By Wolves And Burned By The Sun* and Gibson's powerful urgency in *Like Thousand Dawns*, as well as great duets between the two of them.

Continuing the journey, *Seven Birds* builds gradually into bigger musical themes as Lundström's and Gibson's voices soar with yearning and they turn in a mesmerising multitracked a capella section. *Like Thousand Dawns* features a frenetic opening with great unison-playing between Darby Todd (recently seen behind the kit for Devin Townsend) and the ever-in-demand Jonas Reingold on bass, with aural pyrotechnics from guitarist Per Nilsson – who creates lovely playing and electrifying solos across the album, with his turn on *Spiderweb Train* being particularly tasty.

While containing strong musical themes, *Revelationview* ebbs and flows in intensity to give violinist Elin Rubinsztein and recorder player Fredrik Lindqvist room to stretch out. Late-night fears and uncertainties are reflected in *Chased By Wolves And Burned By The Sun* and *Spiderweb Train*, with the former a track of contrasting feels, baleful at times and playfully intense at others. Entirely instrumental for the first three minutes, the band inject a jazz-fusion influence into proceedings. Finally, a rejuvenated day dawns with relief and optimism in *Songs In Our Hands* and *Sommargryningsljus* recapitulating themes set up right at the beginning.

A beautifully crafted record, *Sommargryningsljus* manages to capture the majesty of classic symphonic prog with a distinctly Scandinavian flavour. Almost 50 years after Kaipa first formed, Hans Lundin is to be applauded for continuing to produce such rewarding music that delights and feeds the soul.

GARY MACKENZIE

HFMC

Eternal Snapshots GLASSVILLE RECORDS

Enjoyable but occasionally bland prog rock tunes from Fröberg's solo project.

Best known as vocalist and guitarist with The Flower Kings, Hasse Fröberg has also led his own band for 15 years. Despite being somewhat more straightforward than his main group, HFMC – that's Hasse Fröberg & Musical Companion – still deliver worthwhile albums, and *Eternal Snapshots* is no exception.

The two-part *All I Wanted To Be* bookends the record with heartfelt melodies/lyrics and dynamic instrumentation, balancing quality songwriting with feisty yet emotional arrangements. Fröberg turns in a boisterous performance on the inspiring *Deserve To Be Happy* and the riotous *Blind Dog*, and the use of woodblocks, organ, bells and horns make centrepiece *Once In A Lifetime* compellingly bold.

Such imaginativeness is necessary, though, because much of what remains is likeable but ordinary. Jubilant rockers *Wherever You May Go* and *Searching For The Dark*, as well as peaceful piano ballad *Only For Me*, are egregious for their lack of innovation and distinctiveness. They don't ruin *Eternal Snapshots* but they definitely diminish what's otherwise a frequently absorbing and adventurous journey. **JMB**

THE HOLY FAMILY

Live Burning, Burning Live ROCKET RECORDINGS

Cooking first live outing from the cosmic tribe.

The Holy Family are a rocket-fuelled supergroup made up of one half of Guapo and two thirds of The Utopia Strong, led by David J Smith of the former, and featuring kosmische magus Kavus Torabi, who really does get around these days.

Live Burning, Burning Live is the first live collection from the band following two studio albums. Recorded at the Roadburn Festival two years ago, it consists of songs from the group's self-titled 2021 debut. The flutes and chimes are still present and correct on opening track *Inward Turning Suns*, although there's an explosion of polyrhythmic intensity midway through, which not only maintains the song's psychedelic complexion but also encourages meditative trance through movement.

Added groove becomes a feature throughout, with the rhythmical Latin percussion of *Chasm Second Part* becoming imbued with even more irrepressible funkiness when performed on stage. Live recordings rarely capture the excitement of being there; *Live Burning, Burning Live* is so tangible that these songs feel like the go-to versions moving forward, and that title is no idle boast. **JA**

THE JANITORS

An Error Has Occurred ROCKET RECORDINGS

Psych-infused Swedish drone rockers continue to hone an absorbing formula.

Although they celebrate their 20th anniversary this year, Swedish quartet The Janitors distinctly recall the music of a previous century. On *An Error Has Occurred* they set their controls for the heart of the sonic template established in the late 80s by the likes of Spacemen 3, Loop and Thee Hypnotics – when a drone wasn't a flying object but a different kind of high, one fuelled by banks of guitars, repetition, feedback, effects pedals and intoxicated incantations.

Those acts in turn, of course, were inspired by late-60s-heads such as The Stooges and the 13th Floor Elevators, echoes of whom also recur at regular intervals here. Fans of slow-burning stoner rock will also find much to like on somnambulant hymns such as *Operator* and *Farewell Spacegirl*. The pace is broken intriguingly elsewhere, though, as the Spector-in-a-snowstorm throb of *In A Bliss* recalls The Jesus & Mary Chain, and the fog clears more arrestingly when a touch of horror-movie melodrama is added to the mix as the chords climb inexorably on *What Is Real*. Here's where frontman Jonas Eriksson summons the spirit of Arthur Brown and adopts a priest-like vocal delivery as *'the darkness consumes'*. **JS**

PAT METHENY

Moon Dial BMG MODERN

Effortlessly emphasised experience and élan.

Nations fall, art fades, yet one-time teenage prodigy Pat Metheny endures as a prolific virtuoso guitarist generating beautiful, peaceful music. *Moon Dial* – his 50th release – is a passionate, sophisticated work, full of understated elegance and considerable substance.

Moon Dial is an overdub-free solo work, played on a custom-built baritone guitar whose Argentinian-made nylon strings allow Metheny to utilise a tuning system previously only possible with their steel counterparts. His excitement in using it resulted in this impromptu collection of original material and well-selected covers to showcase this new instrument. The world may not need another cover version of *Here, There & Everywhere*, but Metheny emphasises the sweetness of the original. It's the same with *Londonderry Air*, a conclusive example of how a solo guitar in the right hands can evoke such passion. His own *This Belongs To You* is the undisputed highlight, six minutes of calm expertise.

The guitarist has called the mood of *Moon Dial* as one of "intense contemplation". With its subtlety and restraint, it offers much-needed respite in this bewildering world. **DEA**

MONO

Oath PELAGIC

Veteran post-rockers pose existential questions on album 12.

Post-rock mainstays for almost 25 years, Japan's MONO have continued to evolve and experiment – and yet they've never sounded as hopeful as they do on *Oath*.

A collection of graceful lullabies, it contrasts the muted mournfulness of their landmark 2009 album, *Hymn To The Immortal Wind*, with feather-light melodies, gentle breezes and climaxes that offer resolution in favour of ambiguity. It's closer to 2021's *Pilgrimage Of The Soul* in terms of the size and power of its crescendos, furthering the band's exploration into a wider spectrum of instrumentation so that guitars and drums aren't their constant epicentre. Melancholic strings purr into *Moonlight Drawing*'s background, and a sombre refrain chills the minimalist *Then, Us*, making this an album where beauty outweighs sadness.

Save for occasional bursts of energy, like the thumping drums that cap the title track, *Oath* plays out in contemplative slow motion. The muted opening of *Time Goes By* is washed away by a proud-but-solemn finale, while the explosive finish to *Run On*'s slow-burning journey is a moment to savour, and one which encapsulates the record's brightened emotions. **POW**

BILL NELSON

Powertron SONOLUXE

Fertile virtuoso refreshes the fretboard.

Relentlessly prolific, possibly raging against the fading of his eyesight, Bill Nelson has recently been releasing albums like a man possessed. No sooner have fans absorbed the exuberant *All The Fun Of The Fair* and the dreamy *Starlight Stories* than out from his archives pops another.

Recorded in 2016, *Powertron* finds Nelson, delightfully, donning his vibrant art-rock guitar hero hat. The track *Drive Shaft* was his starting point for this project, and it's a treat for those whose preferred Nelson persona is the one who shreds like guitars are being banned tomorrow. As it didn't fit with any ongoing works, he decided to build a whole album of kindred "brash" energies. *Fascinating Noise* blasts us in, with the opening line, *'Here comes the thunder, here comes a wave.'* It's no idle boast.

As often with this artist, it's hard to believe one guy is doing everything. The storm surges; insanely fluent guitars spray foam. *Dreams And Smoke* drops the tempo slightly, with textures of Television, while the urgency of *Fair Winds And Steam Machines* feels like a more motivated Magazine. *'At last the future's here!'* sings Nelson, though he's always been ahead of his time. **CR**

PROGRESSIVE METAL

Dom Lawson buckles up for a delve into the darker, heavier side.

With 25 years of bong-ravaged, experimental heaviness under their collective cummerbund, **Ufomammut** are one of progressive doom's most exalted bands. The Italians' 11th full-length album, *Hidden* (Neurot) is one of the heaviest and most out-there things they have ever recorded. Punishingly heavy but never far away from a deranged curveball, songs like opener *Crookhead* use absurdly heavy, repetitive riffs as a launchpad for some strange and unsettling exercises in lysergic mind-fuckery. The 11-minute *Mausoleum* is particularly bewitching.

West Virginian longhairs **Horseburner** have conjured an adventurous substrain of sludge on fourth album *Voice Of Storms* (Blues Funeral). With echoes of early Mastodon, *Nothingface*-era Voivod and any number of psychedelic rock bands, ancient and modern, their songs, which include *Hidden Bridges* and *Diana,* are inventive and absorbing, but always executed with real venom.

Bassist with Amorphis for most of their three decades (and counting), Olli-Pekka Laine has prog metal credentials galore, and his new band **Octoploid** can only add to his legacy. *Beyond The Aeons* (Reigning Phoenix Music) is a remarkable debut, wherein the veteran Finn brings artful heavy metal together with the finest prog and psychedelic tropes, and with a particular penchant for pipe organs, Hammonds and Mellotrons. Those elements have been combined many times before, but thanks to Laine's distinctive songwriting, the likes of *Coast Of The Drowned Sailors* and *The Hallowed Flame* sound like the start of something exciting and authentic. Amorphis fans will love it, and so should everyone else.

Much further down the classic prog rabbit hole, **Isle Of The Cross** have pulled out all the stops for the follow-up to 2020's acclaimed debut *Excelsis*. An hour-long concept piece, *Faustus The Musical* (Season Of Mist) does what it says on the ornately decorated tin, bringing Christopher Marlowe's legendary story to life via a bombastic and theatrical blend of prog, symphonic and death metal. Equal parts brutal and refined, it is also barking mad.

Another band with a colossal sound, **The Eternal** first emerged as doyens of the gothic doom scene, before blossoming into the fervently progressive entity showcased on seventh album *Skinwalker* (Reigning Phoenix Music). Beautifully produced, songs like *Abandoned By Hope* and *The Iconoclast* are profoundly melodic and finely detailed, with regular hints of Katatonia's greyed-out melancholy balancing out the Australians' more monstrous inclinations.

Lastly, **Ghost On Mars** live up to the promise of 2019's *Lost Signals* EP on long-awaited debut *Out Of Time And Space* (Willowtip). This is big-hearted and bold modern prog metal, with a certain debt to Karnivool and their pioneering ilk, but plenty of its own distinct personality too. From the grandiloquent *Beyond The Mist* to the thunderous, emotional blowout of *Lost Signal*, Ghost On Mars sound like future heavyweights.

FRANK ZAPPA & THE MOTHERS OF INVENTION

Whisky A Go Go, 1968 ZAPPA RECORDS/UME

Previously unreleased live experiment from peak-period Mothers.

On the face of it, this looks like something of a peach for aficionados of the never-sharper Zappa. Just four months prior to this extensive three-set hullabaloo, he'd delivered the Mothers' iconoclastic freak-defining, hippie-baiting *We're Only In It For The Money* collection.

Recorded at one of the band's favourite venues on Los Angeles' Sunset Boulevard and advertised via an open invitation in the *LA Free Press* as "five full hours of unprecedented merriment, which will be secretly recorded for

> **There are extensive improvisations that just don't work.**

an upcoming record album", *Whisky A Go Go, 1968* has been a long time coming. So was it worth the wait?

As its 32-track unexpurgated immensity remorselessly unfolds, one cannot help but marvel at Zappa's evident production genius, not so much here as elsewhere. Having initially been aided by sainted production pioneer Tom Wilson (who'd also supplied equally miraculous midwifery services to Bob Dylan and The Velvet Underground) on both *Freak Out!* and *Absolutely Free*, Zappa had engineered and edited his ever-ambitious Mothers' *We're Only It For The Money* efforts with such an adept sleight of hand as to present them as a far more skilled combo than evidenced here, capable of performing to a standard they were never entirely able to duplicate in the live arena.

That said, no one should be surprised by the limitations of this incarnation of the Mothers, least of all Zappa. During the band's first set, he reveals that he'd tried to capture a Mothers live recording before: "In Miami... that didn't turn out too swift." So, was Frank any happier with this attempt? Well, it was shelved for 56 years, remained unreleased in his lifetime and he disbanded these Mothers the following year, ostensibly for financial reasons, but also citing a lack of "sufficient effort" from the musicians.

Ultimately, Zappa's musical ambitions rapidly outgrew the original Mothers, he had designs on different arenas: not just rock, but jazz, modern classical, the avant-garde, and there's a lot more to musique concrète than randomly hitting stuff. So among fair fists at the Mothers greatest 'hits' (*Plastic People*, *Hungry Freaks, Daddy*, a gallant, near-miss attempt at *Brown Shoes Don't Make It*) there are numerous extensive 10-minute plus improvisations that repeatedly just don't work. In fact, much of *WAGG* sounds like the pit orchestra at the local am-dram making a valiant attempt at pulling a Zappa tribute out of their arses. Which, one imagines, was not exactly Frank's avowed intent.

IAN FORTNAM

PIJN

From Low Beams Of Hope FLOODLIT RECORDINGS

A startling and surprising instrumental excursion that's worth taking.

The decaying drone that closes *A Thousand Tired Lives* and brings *From Low Beams Of Hope* to its conclusion feels like a deep look into the infinite void of nothingness. It comes not so much as a feeling of mortal loss, but more as a restorative balm in the face of the sonic violence that has preceded it. And therein lie Pijn's twisted and unpredictable charms – as soon as they're in danger of being pinned down, that's the moment they abruptly change direction.

With a road map such as that at their disposal, this is a journey for those who like their routes to be scenic and with a multitude of surprising views. The first tentative steps of *Our Endless Hours* are innocuous enough thanks to the presence of a single bass note strummed with a nervous energy that rests against the strings of cellos and violins, but the sharp left-turn into cathartic and distorted guitars is as unexpected as it is welcome.

Indeed, Pijn's ability to avoid predictability against a post-rock backdrop is their main strength. Such is the seductive nature of the four epic tracks that make up this album, that the time set aside for it is richly rewarded throughout. **JM**

RENDEZVOUS POINT

Dream Chaser LONG BRANCH

Leprous-adjacent proggers' third release proves worth the wait.

Rendezvous Point clearly aren't a band to be rushed, with five years passing between their second album, 2019's *Universal Chaos*, and this follow-up. But the long gap is forgiven in light of how busy drummer Baard Kolstad usually is with his main outlet, Leprous.

That band are a ready point of reference. Like their singer Einar Solberg, Rendezvous Point's Geirmund Hansen has a high register and an emotive, heartfelt delivery. When he stretches up into his falsetto range in *Fireflies*, it invariably begs comparison with Solberg. However, the two bands have distinct sounds. Rendezvous Point are more firmly rooted in modern progressive metal. The arrangements are well balanced, with Nicolay Tangen Svennæs' keyboards punching just as hard as Petter Hallaråker's guitar riffs. There's plenty of space to accommodate Kolstad's aggressive power and creative syncopation, but there's restraint in the quieter passages of *Presence*. The odd meters of *Wildflower* exemplify their prog proclivities, while on *Still Water* Hansen shows superb control with a stirring solo from Svennæs over the heavy groove. Excellent stuff. **DW**

RICH RUTH

Water Still Flows THIRD MAN

Third album of widescreen soundscapes from eclectic sonic craftsman.

Rich Ruth is a multi-instrumentalist based out of Nashville who makes unclassifiable instrumental music. While there are elements of ambient, avant-jazz, electronica and noise rock in his sound palette, the way they combine is both confounding and liberating. Many of the songs here start off as one thing before transforming into something else entirely, often via the black maw of glowering, untamed guitar.

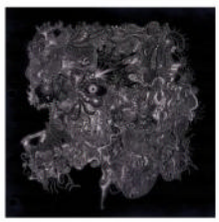
Action At A Distance begins with murmuring horns and twinkling harp before easing into propulsive rhythm, the insistent motorik and arpeggiated synths of krautrock transposed to the sun-kissed prairies of the American interior. In contrast, *Crying In The Trees* is harder and colder, a gathering storm of rumbling drums and block chord distortion suddenly ripped into by an exhilarating blast of sax from guest player Sam Que.

The album reaches its peak on *Aspiring To The Sky*, its slow motion sonic terraforming like some kind of maximalist fourth world exotica. The Berlin school trance of *Blue Shell* and mournful drones of *Somewhere In Time* bring it to a satisfying conclusion. A magical record. **JB**

TAKE & TAKE

Disillusion TAKEANDTAKE.BANDCAMP.COM

US musician Eddie Trager does it all on prog metal debut.



The video for Take & Take's single *Sticky* clearly shows off the prog metal project's background: it depicts Eddie Trager pounding the drums, guitar, bass and keyboards, and delivering vocals, too. The US-based dynamo wrote and played everything on this debut album *Disillusion*, and even created its hand-drawn artwork. Mixing and mastering was done on the outside – including by Jens Bogren (Opeth, Haken) – but don't let that take anything away from Trager's exploits.

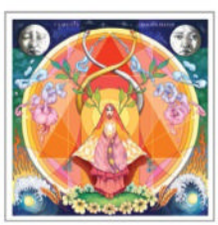
The 11-track album, with lyrics touching on personal struggle and awakening, isn't revolutionary but the chops and imagination make a mark. *Constantly* juggles tricky guitar work with cinematic atmosphere, while the romping *I'm Ritch!* is modern-day Metallica enjoying a devious one-night stand with Between The Buried And Me. It's not all rambunctious riffing and guttural grunts, though – there are some breathers and flashes of quirky genre-hopping – but it can risk losing focus.

For a one-man-band *Disillusion* is pretty impressive. No boundaries are broken, but it's difficult not to get swept up in Trager's absorbing world. **CC**

TAMESIS

Magna Mater TAMESISBAND.BANDCAMP.COM

Folky quartet's debut mini-album weaves a seductive spell.



This Brighton and London-based quartet have been drip-feeding songs in digital form since 2020, establishing their brand of "witch psychedelia" via a string of tempting prog-folk concoctions. This fifth release is their most substantial yet, its 28 minutes just about constituting a mini-album.

'If only I had more to give,' Maisie Ashford laments in an alluring contralto on opening track *Last Flight*, but leaving their public wanting more might prove to be a wise move. There's a compelling atmospheric pull to these songs, not least on *Cambridge Drive*, a gorgeous lilting acoustic reverie that manages to make a street in south London sound as romantic as a sun-dappled avenue in California, assisted by Joseph Jones's pleasantly trippy guitar noodles, bucolic percussion, Irish tin whistle, bird song and the evocative sound of a Tibetan singing bowl.

Elsewhere, a beautifully spangly electro-acoustic riff and stuttering rhythms introduce *Magic* then take off into chunkier guitar dramatics and head-spinning psych-rock as Ashford invites us to '*drown in the wine*'. A tempting proposition. **JS**

TERAMAZE

Eli: A Wonderful Fall From Grace WELLS MUSIC

Shiny, upbeat prog metal from productive Aussies.

Eli: A Wonderful Fall From Grace marks the sixth studio album from Teramaze in just five years and sees the return of Nathan Peachy as lead vocalist. The band's sound has evolved from their early unvarnished thrash roots into a very different beast. Peachy's clean, heartfelt vocals are a perfect match for the pop sensibility that informs much of the songwriting. Even in longer pieces, like *Madam Roma*, the band employ classic pop songcraft techniques using the verses to build tension that is released in the choruses.

Standing Ovation has a big, hooky refrain and *Hands Are Tied* feels like a throwback to 80s power ballads with a piano and strings accompanying Peachy's dramatic delivery. *A Wonderful Fall From Grace* is slick prog metal, although the saxophone solos reinforce that 80s vibe, recalling Aussie rock bands like INXS or Johnny Diesel And The Injectors despite the album's assertively modern production.

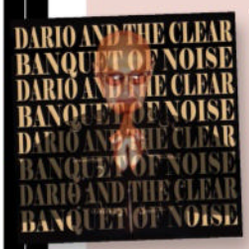
As the third concept album in a trilogy that includes 2015's *Her Halo* and 2021's *Sorella Minore*, *Eli*... doesn't break new musical ground for Teramaze, but their craftsmanship and ear for a tune are undiminished despite their remarkable prolificacy. **DW**

AND LAST BUT NOT LEAST

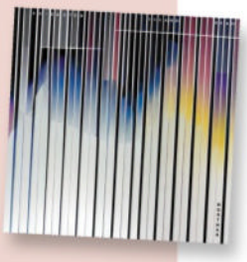
Grant Moon has a rummage down the back of the Prog sofa for the ones that nearly got away...

After his thoughtful, gold-laced 2022 album *Kintsugi*, British composer and instrumentalist **John Holden** continues his impressive run of meaningful albums with *Proximity & Chance* (johnholdenmusic.com). Tigermoth Tales's Peter Jones, guitarist Luke Machin, Southern Empire vocalist Shaun Holton and flute-meister John Hackett are among the talented contributors to another deep, diverse and highly musical tapestry from Holden. Set to a grand, spacious orchestral palette are his musings on everything from superstition (*13*), to Kipling, colonialism and morality (*The Man Who Would Be King*) and the 'Goldilocks Theory' of life on Earth (*Proximity*). More ambitious, intelligent, beautifully conceived music from English prog's best-kept secret.

Italian-born musician/actor Dario Saraceno is a graduate of Berklee Music College, and the third album from his prog ensemble, **Dario And The Clear**, is a welcome slap across the face. *Banquet Of Noise* (darioandtheclear4.bandcamp.com) is a brainy, brawny selection of rock-riffy tunes complete with proggy sax (*Recall*), some industrial-era Bowie moments (*Love Has Won*) and, on the dark *Convicting Silence*, a guest turn from King Crimson Warr guitarist Trey Gunn. It's a crunchy, strident and layered muso trip in the Devin Townsend register, but vocalist/guitarist/Chapman Stickist Saraceno has his own compelling thing going.



Since 2016 the members of experimental Liverpool quartet **Ex-Easter Island Head** have each immersed themselves in other projects, and this creative promiscuity has brought new energy to *Norther* (Rocket Recordings). Citing both avant-garde guitarist Glenn Branca and Sonic Youth as touchstones, the band play prepared guitars to render evolving sounds and unusual textures unlike anyone else's. *Weather* dwells, swells and undulates like rain clouds, the title track is a percussive piece of organic trance, while the Steve Reich-alike *Magnetic Language* is a burbling array of vocal samples set to moreish, beguiling chords. This is odd, charming and properly progressive music.



If that sounds a little left-field then there's always LA's **Oceans Of Night**. Ever-eager prog metal guitarist Scott Mosher and his band return with Mindstorm (oceansofnight.bandcamp.com), another sprawling helping of reverb-heavy, 80s-inflected symphonic/metallic anthems. With a four-strong vocal line-up somewhere amid the long, busy instrumental passages, this is confidently performed, comfortingly familiar and ultimately involving fare.

Nonkeen are a trio of lifelong friends: German keyboardist/music maven Nils Frahm, drummer Frederic Gmeiner and bassist Sebastian Singwald. Following their albums *The Gamble* and *Oddments Of The Gamble*, their latest *All Good?* (Leiter) draws on electronica, psych, ambient and jazz, and it's an absolute summer breeze of a record – a herb-scented zephyr of chilled Rhodes piano (*Will Never*), insistent, wonky grooves (*Be A*) and, on the likes of *Product*, the kind of drifting dynamics only old mates can muster. Balm for the soul.

JETHRO TULL

Bursting Out - The Inflated Edition WARNERS/PARLOPHONE

Wonderful remaster of live double in a three-CD/three-DVD bookset.

With Jethro Tull's classic run of albums, from their 1968 debut *This Was* to 1982's *The Broadsword And The Beast*, all now reissued and repackaged in expanded form as lavish 'bookset' remasters, it's time for the band's first live album to receive the same treatment.

Originally released in September 1978, and recorded earlier that year at a variety of shows on the European tour for *Heavy Horses*, *Bursting Out* captures the band in fiery form while

> **It stands up as a record of Tull as a stadium-filling global brand.**

highlighting Ian Anderson's role as frontman and zany ringmaster. Well-received at the time, it still stands up today as a record of Tull as an exciting live machine and stadium-filling global brand.

Steven Wilson continues his exemplary work remixing the band's back catalogue on *The Inflated Edition*. As well as crystal-clear stereo separation, the sound is much fuller and warmer than the 2004 remaster, the default until now – in fact, it's a huge improvement. Also present and correct are the accompanying series of in-depth interviews and essays that have really made this reissue programme stand out from the pack of archival releases. These include illuminating chats with live crew and recording engineers, plus reprints of contemporary articles. But, as ever, it's Anderson's considered reflections on the album that deliver the best value – likening Wilson's role to somebody examining the "dark details of the interior of my lower rectum" is particularly amusing.

There are audio extras too, the most important of which are the missing songs from the original set, which had previously been cut down to fit on a double LP. The most significant addition is a spirited version of *Heavy Horses*, "dedicated to all old dobbins everywhere." Also new is a short instrumental take of *Living In The Past*, super-charged by guitarist Martin Barre, who plays brilliantly throughout. There's the unedited version of *Songs From The Wood* as well – with the concert split across two CDs, this track now ends with Anderson ribbing the crowd that he'll see them shortly in the bar, as the original show is split into two halves.

Also included are a number of soundcheck tracks from the same tour, recorded to test out the tape machines. The most interesting of these are an early instrumental version of *4.W.D. (Low Ratio)* and a run-through of *Botanic Man*, their unused theme to a David Bellamy TV show. And talking of television, this bookset additionally includes a DVD of Tull's 50-minute performance from Madison Square Garden, broadcast live by satellite to the UK in October 1978, plus a CD edit of the whole concert – previously released in 2009, it's also now been remixed by Wilson.

JOE BANKS

DEVIN TOWNSEND

Terria INSIDEOUTMUSIC

Canadian prog metal visionary revisits his 2001 turning point.

Following directly on from the rare artistic misstep of 2000's *Physicist* and a bleak period of depression and emotional turmoil, *Terria* felt like a deep gulp of clean Canadian air. The idea for a themed album inspired by Devin Townsend's homeland was born when the singer/guitarist undertook his first-ever extensive tour of his own country with his extreme metal project Strapping Young Lad supporting Alberta band The Smalls. The result was a relatively understated classic that still ranks as one of his best solo albums nearly a quarter of a century on.

It's certainly not a travelogue, but there's an expansive feel to the songs that's redolent of broadening horizons. "I started finding myself expanding outside the box... without a lot of the baggage that was part of the prior records," writes the man himself in brand-new liner notes that delve into the creative process surrounding the album. This translated into a more melodic and atmospheric journey, full of breathtaking musical vistas. The multipart *Earth Day* swirls through symphonic swells, floating harmonies and pure prog guitars while *Deep Peace* is a sigh of mellow acoustics, lilting vocals and ambient background sounds. *Canada* is similarly laid-back, but there are strategically placed oddball mid-sections, set-pieces and mind-blowing solos that essentially present mini-songs within songs. Elsewhere the dreamy *Nobody's Here* and the catchy *Stagnant* are delivered with fewer curveballs.

This reissue sees the album taking its own star turn on vinyl, with the same mastering that first appeared on 2018 box set *Eras*. Bonus track *Universal* also makes its vinyl debut here, having originally appeared on the double CD deluxe edition. With its countrified picking and space-rock riffs it still sounds very much like a *Terria* outlier, but it does make a nice inclusion for completist fans. Overall, this is a welcome revival of an album that's well worth revisiting or – even better – discovering for the first time. **PT**

JADE WARRIOR

Borne On The Solar Winds - The Vertigo Albums ESOTERIC

Early album collection shines a light on 70s British prog stylists.

While never as acclaimed as many contemporaries, Jade Warrior were at the vanguard of early 70s British progressive music. Steeped in the folk and psychedelic blues of the late 60s, they were also enthusiastic exponents of Latin American, African and Indian rhythmic elements – rare for European progressive rock artists of the time.

Initially a trio of guitarist Tony Duhig, flautist/percussionist Jon Field and bassist/vocalist Glyn Havard, *Borne On The Solar Winds* collects the three albums they made for the Vertigo label. 1971's eponymous debut captures the eclectic mix of styles, which characterised their early output. *A Prenormal Day In Brighton* boasts early Jethro Tull vibes colliding with shades of Gentle Giant, *Masai Morning* alternates sections of wafting flute and light African percussion with more frenetic percussive workouts and distorted guitar, and *Sundial Song* sandwiches folky urgency between ethereal beginning and end sections.

Later the same year, with drummer Allan Price now a member and contributions from saxophonist Dave Connors, the band put out a second album, *Released*. More direct and mainstream, it moved away from some of its predecessor's more experimental leanings. More obvious rock influences creep in on insistent, conga-driven opener *Three Horned Dragon King* and the band does smoky jazz with *Water Curtain Cave*, while embracing their folk roots with tracks like the smooth, dreamy *Yellow Eyes*. With third album 1972's *Last Autumn's Dream* the band lost their way somewhat – many tracks feel like glorified jams or attempts to build something out of minimal musical ideas, such as *Lady Of The Lake,* which promises much in its first minute or so but ultimately doesn't go anywhere.

There is much here that is worth savouring, but ultimately *Borne On The Solar Winds* documents a band still a bit stuck in the 60s and struggling to evolve a clear vision and stronger songwriting. **GMM**

LINDISFARNE

Brand New Day: The Mercury Years 1978-1979 LEMON

Three-CD set comprising the Geordie folk-rockers final major label releases.

The original Lindisfarne line-up, fronted by Alan Hull, split acrimoniously in 1973, but reformed in 1976, ostensibly for a lucrative, one-off show at Newcastle's City Hall. Demand grew from one show to three that year and Lindisfarne returned to the venue on Christmas Eve 1977. This time they had producer Gus Dudgeon and the Basing Street Mobile studio in tow, and soon came legendary live LP *Magic In The Air*, the first of the three studio albums collected here. Rapturously received stand-outs *Lady Eleanor* and *January Song* still sound magnificent today, and unlike some 'live' records we could mention, *Magic...* wasn't subject to post-performance fixes.

Suitably heartened, Lindisfarne returned to the studio for 1978's Dudgeon-produced *Back And Fourth*. The rough-hewn rusticity that gave classic Lindisfarne LPs such as 1970's *Nicely Out Of Tune* such charm was gone, but *Run For Home*, written by Hull after a bad review of one of his London solo shows, became a much-deserved UK Top 10 hit, while *Warm Feeling* re-cast the band as purveyors of lush, harmony-rich Americana.

Alan Hull had made two fabulous solo records – 1973's *Pipedream* and 1975's *Squire* – prior to the classic Lindisfarne line-up's return, but by 1979's *The News* his stock of quality songs was running low, albeit temporarily. *Evening* and *Easy And Free* sound uncharacteristically toothless, while *Miracles* dabbles in lightweight ska. Elsewhere, a handful of fair-to-middling songs written by his less prolific bandmates only muddied the waters.

A mixed bag then, certainly, but *Brand New* Day provides fascinating insight into the classic line-up's first encore (the second would involve Paul Gascoigne's 1990, Lindisfarne-assisted UK No.2 take on *Fog On The Tyne*). Also included is a 17-page, photo-rich booklet, bonus tracks, and new thoughts on the period from Rod Clements (bass), Ray Jackson (harmonica/mandolin) and Ray Laidlaw (drums). An exemplary re-release. **JMN**

NIGHTINGALE

Nightfall Overture INSIDEOUTMUSIC

Reissued 2005 re-recordings by Swedish prog metallers, now with live extras.

When Dan Swanö began making records under the Nightingale monicker in the mid-1990s, it looked a lot like another side-project; one of the many pies he had his fingers in, from producing Opeth's first two albums to fronting prog metal pioneers Edge Of Sanity and drumming in Mikael Åkerfeldt's death metal supergroup Bloodbath.

But Nightingale slowly grew into a more lasting proposition. Debut concept set *The Breathing Shadow* (1995) was a studio creation, multi-instrumentalist Swanö putting it together solo in a week; then brother Dag came on board for its follow-up, *The Closing Chronicles*, the following year. Since touring third album *I* (2000), intended as a narrative prequel to the first two LPs, they've been a quartet, and in 2005 they took advantage of that reinforced line-up to re-record songs from their first four albums, released as *The Nightfall Overture*, a 10-song set that's now available for the first time on vinyl, and remastered on two CDs with an extra disc featuring 16 live tracks.

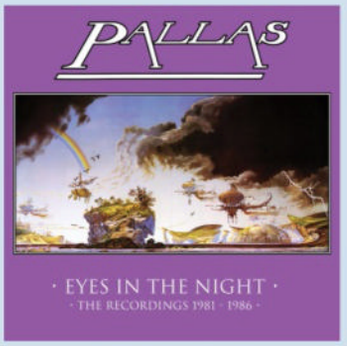
If the 2005 retakes lent early songs such as *The Dreamreader* a more widescreen sound that suited Dan Swanö's maturing, more resonant vocals, then the new remaster also succeeds in building a few more rows on the amphitheatre around them. It also further boosts the propulsive riffing of the defiant *Revival*, the 2005 version already benefitting from a faster tempo and a higher key, as Swanö's vocals once again take more powerful charge of the song.

Also well worth a listen, though, are the live recordings here. While sound quality on some of the shows from the mid-2000s has a bootleg feel, with bar chatter clearly audible, the live atmosphere still adds a thrilling frisson to higher-octane rockers such as *Steal The Moon*, and many of these renditions will get pulses racing faster than the studio versions, even if not every note is perfectly in place. The re-recordings are worth a punt, for sure, but sometimes there's nothing to beat a band firing on all cylinders onstage. **JS**

PALLAS

Eyes In The Night - The Recordings 1981-1986 ESOTERIC

Must-have box set documenting the early years of Scottish neo-proggers.



Given their mixed fortunes, including being unceremoniously cut off by EMI at the height of touring in support of 1986's *The Wedge*, it's a minor miracle that Pallas managed to survive their first few years of existence. This generous seven-disc collection brings together their first three full albums, recordings from both the Reading Festival in 1983 and an Aberdeen gig from 1985, tracks from a 1983 BBC Friday Rock Show session, along with *The Knightmoves* EP, B-sides and bonus tracks.

> **It's hard to think of a more comprehensive celebration.**

With most of the music here being remastered especially for this release and the inclusion of the Blu-ray of a concert filmed in London in 1985, alongside a lengthy booklet detailing the band's early years, it's hard to think of a more comprehensive celebration of one of the bands central to the rebirth of prog in the UK in the late 70s and early 80s.

Entirely self-financed and initially released only on cassette, *Arrive Alive* was an enterprising gamble. Capturing the band – including original frontman Euan Lowson – in full flow at the Bungalow Bar in Paisley in early 1981 and including the contentious minor epic *The Ripper*, it's a muddily recorded yet exciting document of a young band performing ambitious material with skill and energy.

Pallas's first release with EMI gets two discs here. Envisaged as a potential double album vehicle for their *The Sentinel* concept suite of songs alongside additional material they'd been working on, EMI baulked at the idea and talked them into a much reduced tracklisting. Add to this the fact that the band weren't involved in the mixing and the US arm of EMI insisting on a separate mix entirely – it was a somewhat convoluted picture. Running the gamut from the spiky new-wave-inflected *Eyes In The Night (Arrive Alive)* to the grandiose symphonic prog strains of *Atlantis*, it's rightfully considered a neo-prog classic. Here, both UK and US mixes are presented for a compare and contrast, and most of the additional tracks Pallas wanted included have been tacked on for good measure.

The Wedge, from 1986, demonstrates a more mature and sophisticated band, now with vocalist Alan Reed replacing Lowson. While the occasional electronic drums and synth sounds haven't aged well, the production is decidedly cleaner. Pallas explore more pop-prog and even AOR approaches, with *Ratracing* and *Nightmare* among the more distinctly neo-prog highlights.

With the live material here helping to flesh out a picture of an ever-developing seminal neo-prog band, this whole package is impressively extensive and highly recommended. **GARY MACKENZIE**

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NEU KLANG: THE DEFINITIVE HISTORY OF KRAUTROCK

Christoph Dallach FABER

Oral history that liberates the genre's fun side.

Literature about krautrock can take itself as seriously as it takes the genre, with furrowed brows and much beard-stroking. This oral history charms and disarms with an awareness of the absurdities and accidents which led to the music's current hallowed status. "It all starts with the fact that I don't really like the name," winces Neu!'s Michael Rother at one point.

The players interviewed (some now deceased) seem to appreciate the tone, relaxing into their best anecdotes without self-aggrandisement. "As a teenager I daydreamed about shooting up my school with a tank, but I couldn't afford it", says Can's Holger Czukay. And the interviewee call sheet is impressive, from Can, Neu!, Kraftwerk and Tangerine Dream to Eno and Iggy, Paul Weller and Steven Wilson. Harald Grosskopf comes across as a particularly droll wag.

Organised into decades, and reminding us that krautrock's dawn was closer to World War II than to today, the story runs through Nazis, jazz, communes, drugs, and bands well and lesser known. It's as riveting as a Neu! groove. Halleluhwah! **CR**

A VIEW FROM THE EMBANKMENT, A VIEW FROM THE LINE

Andy Stuart KINGMAKER PUBLISHING

New book shines spotlight on Big Big Train's first tour with new singer Alberto Bravin.

Big Big Train's late-blooming success was hard-earned and well deserved. The death of singer David Longdon in 2021 could have derailed them, but after some soul-searching, bassist/founder Greg Spawton rightly elected to continue.

This coffee table book charts 2022's The Journey Continues tour, their first with new singer Alberto Bravin. It's an odd and not entirely successful fusion of photo journal, show-by-show recollections from the band and author Andy Stuart's own extended diary entries. Stuart is a good writer, but his tales of travelling between gigs fall into the 'you had to be there' category, while the band's quotes become repetitious ("This song was tricky to learn, that show was great," etc).

There are some nice details, such as jamming Black Sabbath's *War Pigs* before the Birmingham gig, and Longdon's presence is still keenly felt, but there's just not enough excitement or variation in the prose or (admittedly high quality) photos to sustain it over 250 pages. Still, it's made for the hardcore BBT fan, and they'll doubtless love it. **DEV**

MAX WEBSTER: HIGH CLASS – THE DEFINITIVE HISTORY

Bob Wegner HIGHCLASSMAX.COM

Max to the max – Kim Mitchell's great Canadian eccentrics lavishly profiled.

A professional fact-checker and photo archivist, Bob Wegner doesn't do things by halves. *High Class* lives up to its 'definitive' billing, telling cult hard rock/prog act Max Webster's story in exacting, near day-by-day detail, and gathering hundreds of fabulous, previously unseen photographs.

In his gushing introduction, Canadian songwriter Ron Sexsmith rightly describes Max Webster as "one of the most original bands Canada or any country has ever produced". Wegner is great on the unique writing partnership between frontman/guitarist Kim Mitchell and Max's surrealist lyricist Pye Dubois, and regularly dispenses previously unknown factoids. Who knew that Mitchell's oddball outfit on the back cover of *Mutiny Up My Sleeve* was designed by Geddy's Lee's wife Nancy?

Wegner's prose may be a little colourless, but with its exhaustive discography of key 'unofficial' recordings, *High Class* is the last word on all things Max. **JMN**

A MIRROR OF DREAMS – THE PROGRESSIVE ROCK REVIVAL, 1981-1983

Andrew Wild KINGMAKER PUBLISHING

The UK neo-prog scene remembered in absorbing detail.

Prog readers of a certain age may well have first been turned on to the delights of progressive music by the loosely connected network of bands that emerged in the early 1980s. But outside these pages, that story is seldom told, as histories of the genre have inevitably tended to focus on the giants of the 1970s. Yet many of the acts that first made their mark in that 'second wave' were playing the long game. They were, and are, true believers, which is why they're nearly all still going concerns today.

All the more reason why Andrew Wild's book is an essential read. Few may need the potted history of the original prog scene that constitutes the first chapter, but it's essential context. However, it's when the individuals that would become the mainstays of neo-prog begin to tell their stories that the book really begins to take shape in earnest.

> **What comes through is the passion these artists had.**

Wild paints a picture of seemingly disparate figures dotted across these isles from Southampton to Stroud, Aylesbury to Aberdeen, all of whom would eventually end up sharing stages – often on bills at London's Marquee club, repeatedly referred to as "a shithole", but remembered with universal affection, nonetheless.

It's somewhat surreal to read about a "big six" of the neo-prog scene when some of these groups were barely big enough to sell out their local pub, but what comes through from the scores of interviews (plus some quotes from other books and mags) is the passion these artists had – and would need in spades to overcome a hostile cultural environment where prog was the love that dare not speak its album titles. The same dogged commitment would later see them continue battling on through long periods of commercial adversity, sacrificing personal lives, jobs and more to follow their hearts. More of that will doubtless feature in this book's sequel, as this just documents the scene's early days.

A Mirror Of Dreams is a trove of great photos, record company rejection letters, ticket stubs, flyers and typed tour itineraries that convey the DIY feel of it all. Meanwhile the tales keep coming, whether it's Fish bashing out the rhythm of *Garden Party* on the heads of rowdy drunks, IQ's keyboard player trying to half-inch the 'Q' from the Marquee sign or Pallas securing a rehearsal spot in a farmhouse "as long as we didn't steal his potatoes". Great days.

JOHNNY SHARP

Take a bow

RIVERSIDE

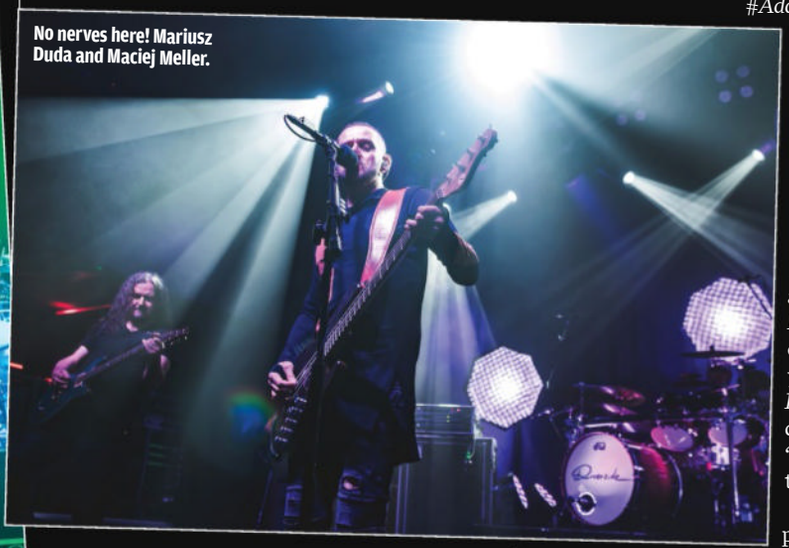
VENUE	KOKO, LONDON
DATE	19/05/2024
SUPPORT	KLONE

Klone's rich acoustic set packs a punch.

Prog ponders the wisdom of **Riverside** frontman Mariusz Duda, who's standing in front of a venue full of prog fans and questioning his band's role within that very genre. He may couch his language to imply a certain element of tongue-in-cheek – his point that Riverside have been likened to Dream Theater but have little in common with the latter's "guitar-shredding" definitely rings true – but further protestations veer a little towards biting the hand that feeds. Not least when, following a splendid rendition of *Post-Truth* from latest album *ID. Entity*, the band launch into the very long – 13 minutes and counting – and very proggy *The Place Where I Belong*.

Despite the intended humour, one can sense an element of frustration that being labelled prog has somehow held this band back to an extent in the bigger scheme of things, although it should be noted that tonight is Riverside's biggest UK show to date. To be fair, they've never been a full-on prog metal band, nor are they a classic-sounding prog band, but like many modern prog bands, they combine intelligent, prog-leaning rock with other influences to create a variant on the genre.

CARSTEN WINDHORST


No nerves here! Mariusz Duda and Maciej Meller.

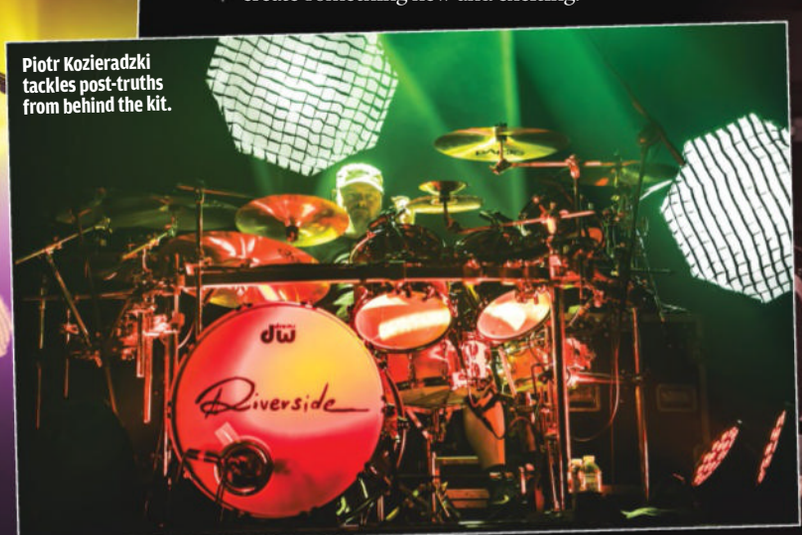
However, it is perhaps a tad churlish to raise this as an issue given that we're now more than 20 years into Riverside's career, and that's where the bulk of their audience – as well as that of Duda's other offshoots, which include Lunatic Soul and his solo electronica project – come from.

Openers French prog metallers **Klone** (who we hope harbour no such qualms about the label) enthral the audience with an acoustic set that packs more punch than any acoustic session these ears have heard and highlights Yann Ligner's stunning vocals. Despite not being plugged in, the set is full of the rich atmospherics that flow through the band's recorded music, although astonishingly they perform only two songs from 2023's majestic *Meanwhile* –*Bystander* and *Scarcity* – and two from 2019's equally enjoyable *Le Grande Voyage*. The bulk of the set comes from 2015's *Here Comes The Sun*, while a thoughtful cover of Soundgarden's *Black Hole Sun* induces a mass singalong that most definitely wins over a crowd who'd possibly not encountered this French band before.

For all the quibbles about Duda's possibly misdirected tirade, Riverside themselves are equally fantastic. Opening with a throbbing take on *Love, Fear And The Time Machine*'s *#Addicted*, Michał Łapaj's wonderfully melodic keyboards – very proggy keyboards, it should be noted – are the driving force behind the band's crystalline sound tonight. An impressive array of lasers herald the arrival of *Landmine Blast*, the first offering from last year's excellent *ID. Entity*, which draws a squall of 'oohs' and 'ahs' from the audience.

The crowd-pleasing *Egoist Hedonist* from 2009's *Anno Domini High Definition* continues that momentum. Having toured in support of *ID. Entity* for much of 2023, and performed on this year's Cruise To The Edge before touring South America, Riverside really are a well-oiled live machine, and *Friend Or Foe?*, which comes across like a proggier take on A-ha, is a perfect example of the band's ability to cross genres to create something new and exciting.

Most definitely a shred-free zone!


Piotr Kozieradzki tackles post-truths from behind the kit.

Maciej Meller perfects those long and complicated sections.

Michał Łapaj channels his inner A-ha!

Although a sense of frustration at genre tags is understandable, it's hardly unique to prog. However, it should also be noted that this writer has friends in attendance this evening who, until they saw the band at last year's Prognosis Festival in London, had never even heard of Riverside. Yet having seen them once, were damn sure they weren't going to miss the chance to see them again. It reinforces *Prog*'s long-held belief that people just need to hear this music for its appeal to grow.

As for the headliners themselves, as 2005's *Conceiving You* ends proceedings on a fittingly high note, absolutely nothing can detract from the fact that this has been an absolute stormer of a live show from a terrific band.

JERRY EWING

Prog or not, Riverside put on an excellent live show.

> **"Absolutely nothing can detract from the fact that this has been an absolute stormer of a live show from a terrific band."**

GOUVEIA ART ROCK FESTIVAL

VENUE	TEATRO-CINE, PORTUGAL
DATE	03/05/2024-05/05/2024

Nestling in the mountainous Centro region of Portugal, the beautiful town of Gouveia has hosted Gouveia Art Rock since 2003. Although the event has been dark for the last couple of years, there's a celebratory atmosphere here today in the elegant Art Deco cinema that houses the festival as the capacity crowd immerse themselves in an eclectic array of international performers spread over three days.

The extent of its broad reach is immediately apparent as **The Hedvig Mollestad Trio** and Gryphon share the opening evening. Despite their wildly differing musical flavourings, this unlikely combination provide a rich and tasty feast. Mollestad's band hurtle through a cerebral combination of harmony and freewheeling solos encased in a skull-crushing heavy rock vocabulary, sounding at times like a head-on collision between The Groundhogs' buzz-cut edges and the ferocious muscle of The Tony Williams Lifetime. They're obviously enjoying themselves, and at one point during the set Mollestad and bassist Ellen Brekken leap from the stage to sit in different aisles next to shocked but delighted audience members without missing a beat as they rampage through their twisting set.

When **Gryphon** take the stage they're greeted by a roar that's usually reserved for conquering heroes back from the dead, and in a way perhaps they are. Their 2020 album, *Get Out Of My Father's Car!* was a great return to form and it provides brilliant chunks of tonight's setlist. Whether brandishing a bassoon or cavorting with a crumhorn, original member Brian Gulland is an electrifying presence. He's just turned 73, and there's surely no other person capable of convincingly declaiming, '*When I was a boy I distinctly remember that I was a tree.*' Their beguiling mix of surrealist whimsy and stirring fusion of baroque and prog sensibility comes with a scalpel-sharp musicality.

With **Gong** scheduled to appear at midnight the following evening, a few older attendees worry they might struggle to stay awake. However, as the witching hour strikes, there's no risk of snoozing. Gong largely draw upon 2023's *Unending Ascending* to get things underway, and Dave Sturt's bass is as supple as it is brutal, going deep enough to threaten a landslide in the surrounding hills. A bravura collection of hypnotic riffs and chants, they're incandescent with a shamanic intensity as Kavus Torabi's windmilling chords and soaring vocals melds with Fabio Golfetti's floating glissando guitar, which sleekly pierces the warm Portuguese air. This current incarnation stands as one of the very best in Gong's convoluted history. Gouveia might be a long way away but the effort is more than worth it.

SID SMITH

PENDRAGON

VENUE	TRADING BOUNDARIES, FLETCHING
DATE	09/05/2024

On a sunny evening in the heart of the East Sussex countryside, Pendragon kick off their 2024 tour with a special two-part set at the quirky Trading Boundaries.

Entering the stage to warm applause, Pendragon open with the pseudo-classical organ intro to *Everything*, and frontman and guitarist Nick Barrett immediately encourages the crowd to clap along, setting the tone for the evening.

"We're going to play some quite unusual stuff tonight," he promises and he's clearly in a playful mood as he refers to the band as "Trotter's panopticon of prog rock".

Next comes *The Walls Of Babylon* from 1993's *The Window Of Life*, which showcases Barrett's excellent guitar articulation with both tremolo arm and fingers, along with first-rate vibrato and phrasing. He gestures and "talks" with his hands as he sings the first verse, something he continues to do throughout the concert when he is not playing guitar lines. He's backed by Jan-Vincent Velazco, whose drumming slips easily from complex fills in the initial section to a regular, rock-solid back beat in the chorus. There's a nimble keyboard solo from Clive Nolan, perfectly in time with Barrett, and together they reach a thunderous conclusion. The band are tight and in good form, along with two backing vocalists, Johanna Stroud and Sally Minnear.

"Pendragon are clearly among friends at Trading Boundaries."

Another track from *The Window Of Life*, *Ghosts*, is played with some cavalry-style snare drum and excellent cymbal work in the mid section. Then comes a surprise: a song the band have only played twice before, *Skara Brae* (affectionately known among bandmembers as 'Scary Barry'). Dense, complex, polyrhythmic drumming fills the intimate venue along with a wandering guitar under the vocals,

Pendragon: a band of brothers, for sure.

ANNE-MARIE FORKER

Perfect timing from Nick Barrett and Clive Nolan.

Multitasking on *360 Degrees*.

which is delicate, free and smooth, never distracting from the vocal line. Peter Gee's bass playing is first-rate in the later section, with fast, melodic runs providing texture.

Schizo slows the tempo of the set before Barrett confesses to everyone that his first crush was Marina from the 60s TV show *Stingray*, and that from a young age he was inspired by water and boats. Visibly emotional, he delivers a rich and sonorous guitar solo during *North Star, Part III: Phoenician Skies*. The tempo picks up again with *Nostradamus (Stargazing)*, which is played a little faster than on the record, and the audience clap along, bouncing in their dining seats, chanting the '*Stargazing, groundbreaking, dream making, breathtaking*' refrain. *Sister Bluebird*, with its bluesy lyrical guitar intro, concludes the first half of the set before Barrett quips, "We're off for a Pot Noodle — see you in a minute."

First-rate: bassist Peter Gee.

Post-noodle consumption, the second half begins with *360 Degrees* from the band's most recent full-length album, *Love Over Fear*, during which Barrett plays a mandolin and Stroud, a violin. It's now dark outside, so the venue's atmosphere changes as *Eternal Light* fills the room and the flickering candlelight on the dining tables becomes more visible. The instrumental section is captivating and the audience are completely entranced, their gaze fixed on the stage, enthralled and at peace.

A bright and intricate keyboard solo from Nolan, full of arpeggios, is the highlight of *Paintbox*, along with the strong top-end of Barrett's voice, while the audience join in on the triple claps during the keyboard solo of fan favourite *The Last Man On Earth*.

The band reach peak form for *A Man Of Nomadic Traits*, where the drums and keyboard are in perfect sync with lush vocals harmonies. The pulsing snare under the first guitar solo is like a train at high speed, and, after another immaculate solo from Barrett, the audience stand up and applaud.

It would have made a fitting encore, but there's one more song to come, one the band haven't played "for a few years" — *It's Only Me* from 2008's *Pure*. The '*We are a band of brothers*' chorus line seems especially well chosen for the welcoming atmosphere. Pendragon are clearly among friends at Trading Boundaries tonight.

ANNE-MARIE FORKER

DESERTFEST

VENUE	VARIOUS, LONDON
DATE	17/05/2024-19/05/2024

Normally, Desertfest is London's annual celebration of all things woozy and doomy, spotlighting bands inspired by Black Sabbath, Sleep and so on. However, for 2024, the three-day festival has broken the mould, booking genre-mashers Masters Of Reality, speedsters Suicidal Tendencies and post-metal duo Godflesh to headline. There are also a host of forward-thinking bands across the weekend, starting with **Pijn**.

The instrumentalists haven't released a record in six years, but Dingwalls is crammed by the time they arrive. Half-symphonic, half-heavy, they use strings and keyboards to amplify the majesty of their post-rock crescendos. The setlist is sourced almost exclusively from their upcoming second album, *From Low Beams Of Hope*, and the beauty of the material alongside the enthusiasm of the audience suggests the cycle ahead will be a successful one.

Later, fellow Dingwalls act **Blanket** wield post-rock to different effect, employing vocals and tighter structures while sourcing influence from shoegaze. The result is a dreamy haze of texture, but the ambient tone means the band's hooks are nowhere as sharp as they could be. With a more focused sound that lets their choruses gleam in the mist, this quartet could be one of the more accessible and promising names in their niche.

Alber Jupiter end the Friday with a more unique approach. The bass-and-drums two-piece use looper pedals to build walls of low-end fuzz, making them one of the most daring and noisy performers of the weekend.

Saturday's broadly devoid of proggier bands, except for psychedelic post-rockers **Maserati**. The Americans cram The Underworld, then get everybody boogying with their drum beats. Plus, the mix is so loud that it gets the hairs on people's arms vibrating.

Ufomammut are almost as cacophonous inside the Electric Ballroom on Sunday. The psychedelic metal trio draw heavily from the thunderous material on their brand-new album, *Hidden*. It's a barrage of volume, the impact of the riffs hammered home by a frantic light show. However, their progressive prowess is undeniable. **Ozric Tentacles** follow and, as a less heavy option than much of the bill, draw a sadly thin audience. Nonetheless, they fly, pairing cosmic guitar leads, keys and flutes with some suitably hallucinogenic imagery from their video backdrop.

Prog metal up-and-comers **DVNE** end the weekend with arguably the most consummate set. They play current album *Voidkind* almost in its entirety, stacking layers of guitars, keyboards and vocals to cultivate a brutal yet melodically intricate showcase. The crowd's euphoric screams afterwards signal that Desertfest has come to a very triumphant conclusion.

MATT MILLS

HAUNT THE WOODS

VENUE	GULLIVERS, MANCHESTER
DATE	03/05/2024

It's a one-band show tonight, with the self-described "Cornish hippies" wanting to keep their first independently organised tour simple. Despite their late arrival after a protracted drive up from the capital, where they successfully packed out the Old Church in St Pancras the night before, they make it onstage for the penultimate date of what's been an experimental tour for the prog-folk outfit.

Their performance, upstairs in a Northern Quarter bar beneath a stained glass chandelier, may have felt like something of a comedown with the audience numbers somewhat sparse as they roll into the ever-classy *Gold*. Yet there's some charm in that, and the band seem eternally grateful to those who have made the journey, despite a tongue-in-cheek jibe of "everybody bring a friend next time" towards the end.

It makes for a chilled, conversational evening, as if the band are performing in our living room, slippers and all. So much so, in fact, that one audience member shouts above the dying applause that follows a twinkling and minimalist *Numb*: "What was that song called?" Cue singer and guitarist Jonathan Stafford regaling a tale of the song's creation, which involved marijuana, a cheese sandwich and unblinkered spontaneity. It seems unlikely that interaction could have happened the night before, making it a moment to savour ahead of a – hopefully – better attended return to the city in the future.

The as-yet-unreleased *Ashes* also taps into that magic. Performing off-mic, with four-part vocal harmonies the only accompaniment to Stafford's barely-stroked acoustic guitar, the skin-prickling number showcases a band at the height of their powers. It's a track – and, indeed, a moment – as beautifully fragile as they come, and as one audience member leaves halfway through to replenish his drink, he does so on his tiptoes, so as to avoid disturbing the arresting, almost-deadly silence.

In comparison, *Now Is Our Time*'s odd-time opening salvo seems ear-splitting, emphasising just how quiet the room had been not too long ago. While the reverb-heavy drums do sadly drown out the intricacies of their guitars in the pre-chorus, it's the only marked criticism of a sprawling, personable set. The song holds its head above the parapet as one that best captures the band's admirably multifaceted chic. There are flavours of Gilmour in Phoenix Elleschild's guitar solo, which bursts like a ray of light out of *The Line, Pt II*'s piano-led sadness, while *Elephant* sees Stafford's inner singer-songwriter shine brightly – its whisper-soft verses contrast with a seismic chorus complete with soaring high notes that Muse's Matt Bellamy would applaud. For those here, tonight feels special, but the empty spaces in the room underline the importance of supporting up-and-coming artists. Haunt The Woods are a band worth getting behind.

PHIL WELLER

ELBOW

VENUE	02 ARENA, LONDON
DATE	09/05/2024

More than once tonight, Guy Garvey mentions that "devastating romantic regrets" are a theme of Elbow's songs. And the melancholy hum that runs through many of their pieces, whether it's the epics or the quieter miniatures, echoes that which coloured the Genesis period of *A Trick Of The Tail* and *Wind And Wuthering*. Yet the wry chuckle with which Garvey offers this is also key to Elbow's appeal. A big, cheery, sentimental bear of a performer, he knows that an audience as vast as the band's 27-year career has assembled requires more than one mood on a night out in an arena. At one point he's leading the crowd in chants of "Way-oh!" and "Woah-ooh!", like a more casually attired Freddie Mercury at Live Aid.

Onstage, as on record, Elbow have mastered the balance of broody and boisterous, of introspection and larks, of pensiveness and party time. Fun doesn't have to be inane. The set here is shrewd, the pacing perfect, and everybody leaves with a splashy grin on their face while knowing the deep end was explored and not ignored.

It's miraculous how Elbow manage to pull this off. With their frequent tempo and time-signature trickery, and lyrics as thoughtful as any in the modern era, they should, rationally, be a cult band. Their greater reach, playing the big rooms, is partly down to Garvey's unpretentious likeability as a frontman — and partly because their songs are so immaculately structured. That the band then choose to garnish them in weirdness just adds filigree.

> **"The set is shrewd, the pacing perfect, and everybody leaves with a splashy grin on their face."**

Of course they also have a fail-safe. *One Day Like This*, from their popular crossover album *The Seldom Seen Kid*, became pretty much the *Hey Jude* of a generation from 2008 onwards. Inevitably, it's the last encore here, and if the band are weary of playing it, it doesn't show. The crowd bathe in the exhortations to *'Throw those curtains wide'*, arms waving, voices raised, the gig going out on a near-religious high.

There's been playfulness from the start, with a red neon sign reading 'ELBOW', in the style of the famous 'ELVIS' icon, standing cheekily behind the band. Confidently, they open with two songs from latest album *Audio Vertigo* which, after the retreat into dreamy reverie of *Flying Dream 1*, is an unapologetic return to more aggressive, rock-based stylings. *Things I've Been Telling Myself For Years* and *Lovers Leap* are instantly welcomed into the Elbow canon, the latter bouncing on itchy brass stabs and hungry rhythms. The group are beautifully complemented by violinists and, on *Dexter & Sinister*, singer Jesca Hoop doing her best *The Great Gig In The Sky* tribute over the coda.

Garvey at home in the Dome.

KEVIN NIXON

Guy Garvey: understated but always classy.

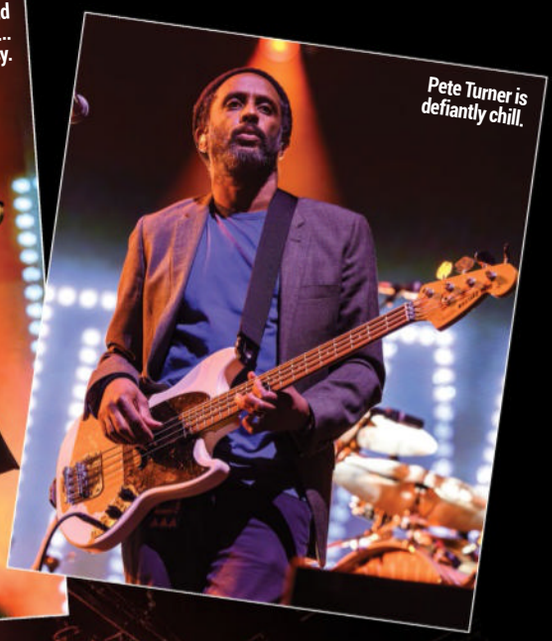
And as the delicate *The Bones Of You* fades out, it morphs into Gershwin's *Summertime*, a sleight-of-hand moment, which again confirms the outfit's well-judged bravado. *Mirrorball*, a sumptuous ballad, benefits from an actual massive revolving mirror ball exploding with light in the centre of the hall. Elbow don't compete at the highest level with regard to visual effects, but the ones they do deploy hit the spot.

"It's nice to be back in Peter Mandelson's wigwam," quips Garvey, pausing the spell and reminding us that the Millennium Dome (which now houses the O2 Arena) was a thing around the time Elbow were recording their debut *Asleep In The Back*. Their evolution since that (remarkably intense) album has been a blossoming, as the mid-set, mid-tempo numbers go on to show. *Balu* stomps the gears up again, showcasing the band's fiery side, while *Kindling*, the underrated climax to 2017's *Little Fictions*, is peak Garvey-as-romantic-poet.

The home stretch is euphoric, whether they're charging through the neo-punky *Good Blood Mexico City*, urging us to support food banks, or feeling moved in the Manchester rain on *Station Approach*. *Grounds For Divorce* and its gnarly riff even chuck in a bit of headbanging. And as that anthemic encore soars, it's verified that there's something heroic about Elbow: an arena band who never gave up on sincere soul, graspable strange sounds and the strength of sensitivity. No regrets.

CHRIS ROBERTS

Summertime and the livin' is easy... and a bit noisy.


Pete Turner is defiantly chill.

Ladies and gentlemen, Elbow have entered the building.

SLEEPMAKESWAVES

VENUE	THE GARAGE, LONDON
DATE	12/05/2024
SUPPORT	L.O.E., GRAYWAVE

Less a European tour, more a weekend away, despite Sleepmakeswaves not playing a concert on the continent for five years, the Sydney post-rockers are only doing two dates upon their return: a spot at Belgium's Dunk!Festival, followed by tonight's London headliner. Instrumental four-piece **L.O.E.** commence the show in the capital by offering a refreshing twist on well-worn post-rock tropes. Not only is their light show impressively erratic for an opener, but their drum patterns prove fascinating and their crescendos are packed with some extra energetic metal.

Graywave bridge post-rock and shoegaze to hypnotic effect. Normally the solo outlet of Birmingham musician Jess Webberley but tonight a fully rounded quartet, the band perform amid a shroud of concealing smoke. However, their dense blasts of sound permeate the haze, as do Webberley's extended, melodic cries.

Sleepmakeswaves have only been in Europe for a day but, when they headline in Highbury, they're already a man down. As bassist, keyboardist and co-founder Alex Wilson explains before the start of the set proper, touring guitarist Lachlan Marks has been indisposed by a dodgy kebab the night before. Drummer Tim Adderley isn't faring much better, having been unwell since 4:30am, yet the impromptu trio (rounded out by guitarist Otto Wicks-Green) plough on regardless. Thank fuck they do: operating at less than 75 per cent strength, Sleepmakeswaves are still capable of a remarkable display.

All Hail Skull and *Super Realm Park* – both from this year's *It's Here, But I Have No Names For It* album – open in a flurry of noise and dynamics. Even without Marks, these are deeply layered compositions, Adderley and Wilson's rhythm section building an impenetrably heavy foundation for Wicks-Green's riffs to dance over. The guitarist belts out his parts with gusto, especially when Wilson retreats to the keyboard towards the rear of the stage, using the space to scurry around every inch he can. All the while, the band are backed by a stunning light show, their most hard-rocking tracks, like the juggernaut of drumming that is *Ritual Control*, accompanied by darting flashes.

Sleepmakeswaves also pull a sense of celebration from their set, playing a trilogy of songs from *Love Of Cartography* for its 10th anniversary. *Great Northern*, *Something Like Avalanches* and *The Stars Are Stigmata* together highlight the Aussies' versatility, ascending from dainty keyboard notes to full-blown barrages of post-rock texture.

Pyramids (from 2020's *These Are Not Your Dreams*) draws the night to an aptly diverse close – weaving through eight minutes of piano, prog and all-out metal guitars – and the band are all smiles as they depart. Clearly, they know just as well as their audience that they've overcome the odds to lay down a post-rock triumph.

MATT MILLS

JAMBINAI

VENUE	DINGWALLS, LONDON
DATE	15/05/2024

Although post-rock is quite possibly a better description than prog for Jambinai, the Korean collective's fairly unconventional (by western standards) instrumental set-up shows that they're pushing the genre's boundaries outside of its usually very comfortable box. Two weeks into their European tour, the band are finally stopping off in London to present their unique sound to a UK audience once again, after having headlined Portals Festival almost a year ago to the day.

With no support act, and the unseasonal hot weather having done a good job of warming up the crowd, Jambinai take the stage with myriad strange and unusual instruments, which is what sets them apart from other acts. These includes a haegeum, which is about the size of a violin but only has two strings; the double-reed taepyeongso, which looks like a tiny trumpet; a piri, which physically comes close to an oboe but has a far more piercing sound that allows its melodies to cut through the music; and finally, the geomungo.

Played by Sim Eun-yong, the geomungo is the most physically imposing instrument on offer tonight and takes up a vast amount of the stage. It also has the most unique timbre. It's plucked, bowed and whacked to create an assortment of different string sounds that lead to grandiose levels of expression during Jambinai's impressive performance.

Mesmerising doesn't begin to cover it. The drone of the haegeum, combined with aggressive strumming on the geomungo, as well as the more traditional western electric guitar, bass, and drums, allows for fresh arrangements to be created full of unique harmonies.

One of this evening's highlights is their emotive performance of *They Keep Silence*, a piece that has moving history. It transforms the story of the Sewol ferry disaster from 2014 into musical form; singer, guitarist, and frontman Lee Il-woo mentions that more than 300 people died in the tragic accident, the majority of which were school-aged children. It's an offer of condolence to all those that lost friends and family.

A few songs later, Lee offers up what he calls music of gratitude to all of the audience members and brings the taepyeongso to the front of the stage. Starting with a small and intimate solo on this unfamiliar instrument, the arrangement gradually builds and builds in true post-rock style.

Encore *Grace Kelly* offers the shortest yet heaviest performance of the evening, and grabs everyone's attention for one final hurrah.

Jambinai put on a unique show, one that blends many different flavours of music to create something new. The very essence, then, of what progressive music is all about.

GRACE HAYHURST

LOST IN KIEV: DIN OF CELESTIAL BIRDS; THIS WILL DESTROY WANG WEN; ESTIE-JOY BOOLEY. ELEPHANT GYM; ENEMIES; IF THESE TREES COULD TALK; LITE; OVERHEAD THE ALBATROSS; TALIE EIGELAND. MIDAS FALL; STANDARDS; YAMA WARASHI; LAURA PEREZ

PORTALS FESTIVAL

VENUE	EARTH, LONDON
DATE	25/05/2024-26/05/2024

This isn't a traditional prog festival. Portals will likely never try to book Rick Wakeman or Nektar, but every year this two-day event hosts some of the most fearless youngsters in modern music, now mostly grouped into the post-rock and math rock niches. Such an innovative stance on experimental sounds has seen this weekender grow exponentially, this year selling more tickets than ever before.

Upstairs, on the smaller of EartH's two stages, **Din Of Celestial Birds** open everything using the type of music long associated with this festival: climactic, instrumental post-rock. Nonetheless, these Brits still feel fresh, thanks to their animated stage presence and attention-demanding blasts of light. **Yama Warashi** follow, contrasting sparse percussion, bass and keyboard notes against densely textured vocal melodies coming from every single member. Such a progressive and inventive approach captivates early attendees.

Downstairs, post-rockers **Enemies** continue their comeback, having recently returned from a six-year hiatus. Portals clearly haven't forgotten this lot though, as their twinkly and technical approach gets the main stage's masses dancing with ease. **Lite**'s tracks take the high-flying guitar athletics signature to math rock, but cast them against far heavier and more accessible drumming. Not only does it offer a twist on familiar tropes, but the groovy percussion incites plenty of movement throughout this show.

"Again and again Portals has given attendees bands that break the mould of the post-rock and math rock genres."

One of the quintessential bands in modern post-rock, **This Will**

Wang Wen: Hans Zimmer meets Mogwai vibes.

Enemies: twinkly and technical.

Math rock adventurers, Elephant Gym.

The dazzling Lost In Kiev.

Awesome openers Din Of Celestial Birds.

Overhead, The Albatross: enthrall.

An arresting set from Midas Fall.

Headliners If These Trees Could Talk hit their groove.

The captivating Yama Warashi.

Destroy You prove why the genre deserves a place beneath the prog umbrella. The American outfit largely play songs from their beloved first two albums (fans voted for the setlist, after all), most of which carry the dynamics of classical movements, played by rock instruments. It's a display so sophisticated yet cathartic that the technical struggles at the start of the set are overlooked, especially as later tracks get their crescendos underlined by bright, powerful lights.

Sunday starts with **Midas Fall**, whose vulnerable-sounding post-rock pulls from the genre's usual suspects as well as more far-flung names like The Cure. It's a more arresting experience than math rock duo **Standards**, who try to cultivate a good-time vibe with their flamboyant compositions and colourful imagery. However, covers of the *Super Mario* theme and stage banter with a fake Southern accent make the pair more annoying than endearing. At least **Overhead, The Albatross** take this shit seriously. The Irishmen – who, yes, have taken their name from a Pink Floyd lyric – pull a surprisingly diverse array of ideas from the post-rock framework. Prog, metal and even spoken word all form parts of this collective's enthralling canon.

Lost In Kiev are among the most dazzling acts of the weekend, armed with a light show that explodes in response to every slyly twitching riff and progressive crescendo. The Parisians begin a hot streak of top-notch artists that continues through **Elephant Gym** and until the end of the festival. The Taiwanese trio are math rock adventurers, the lead bass guitar playing and charming chatter of KT Chang dictating their direction. Headliners **If These Trees Could Talk**, like This Will Destroy You, have to overcome technical issues, but maintain the momentum when they hit their groove. The Americans take more from metal than most this weekend, but they deploy the heaviness tastefully, only bringing it out to hammer home the apexes of their weaving songs. The problems mean tonight probably isn't the first impression the band hoped to make, though their partisan crowd is swept up nonetheless.

High-flyers: Lite.

A cathartic set from This Will Destroy You.

Wang Wen close the second stage with a showcase of near-symphonic proportions. Trumpets and keyboards back the usual guitars and drums, making the band half Mogwai and half Hans Zimmer as a result. It's an appropriately inventive approach with which to end Portals, as this weekend again and again has given attendees bands that break the mould of the post-rock and math rock genres.

MATT MILLS

Standards bring a good-time vibe.

THE DECEMBERISTS

VENUE	THE FILLMORE, PHILADELPHIA, PA, USA
DATE	08/05/2024

Prog-adjacent folk/indie rockers The Decemberists are revered for their eclectic and lively concerts. They certainly deserve the acclaim tonight, as they deliver a wide-ranging setlist that celebrates new LP, *As It Ever Was, So It Will Be Again*, as well as their back catalogue. While they could have highlighted more complex compositions, it's impossible not to be charmed by their performance.

Vocalist/songwriter Colin Meloy begins the show with a solo acoustic rendition of *Red Right Ankle* (from 2003's *Her Majesty*). Following ample applause, the rest of the troupe appear and play at least one tune from every album except for their 2002 debut, *Castaways And Cutouts*.

Rustic classics, such as *June Hymn* and fan-favourite *The Crane Wife 1*, maintain the delicate vibe. All are replicated superbly, with Meloy's trademark twangy vibrato sounding as rich as ever as his bandmates nail just about every instrumental nuance and backing harmony of the studio originals. It's disappointing that they don't include *The Crane Wife 2* in addition to the first part, but that's a minor complaint.

They dive into some invigoratingly busy and multilayered material, too, via radiant ballad *Make You Better*, synthpop curiosity *Severed*, and *Picaresque* staples *Sixteen Military Wives* and *The Sporting Life*. That last song is enhanced by extra horns, and the unexpected cover of The Smiths' *This Charming Man* during the outro is a nice touch.

Attendees hoping to hear The Decemberists' proggier side may have been disappointed overall, yet the band's flawless interpretation of intricate behemoth *The Queen's Rebuke/The Crossing* surely scratches that itch. They also pull out the 19-minute finale of their new LP (*Joan In The Garden*) as the encore and, delightfully, it evokes earlier prog-folk medleys *The Tain* and *The Island*.

The quintet play several other pieces from *As It Ever Was...*, including baroque Americana ode *Burial Ground* and jazz orchestra homage *Oh No!*. The crowd are as captivated by them as they are with their older material.

There's minimal visual spectacle, aside from lights and a pastoral backdrop, but that's fine since what's there fits the mood of the music. Meloy's banter between tunes – with both the audience and his bandmates – is playful and endearing, adding to the genteel atmosphere.

Despite the omitted tracks, tonight's performance is an absolute knockout. By highlighting the greatness of their upcoming record amid their classics, The Decemberists remind all in attendance of their exceptional chemistry and creativity, and 25 years after they began, their concerts remain utterly unmissable.

JORDAN BLUM

THE CHRONICLES OF FATHER ROBIN

VENUE	ASKER CULTURAL HOUSE, NORWAY
DATE	24/05/2024

Following a lengthy gestation period, The Chronicles Of Father Robin make a rare live appearance on the first day of Asker's We Låve Rock 2024. The collective includes some of Norway's finest prog rock musicians from Wobbler, Tusmørke, Jordsjø and The Samuel Jackson Five, and tonight's challenge is to present all three volumes of their ambitiously conceptual *The Songs & Tales Of Airoea*, in order, in their entirety, over three hours!

The character of Father Robin embodies all the bandmembers and their life challenges, sprinkled with inspiration from different mythologies. The crowd's anticipation is palpable as the eight-piece take to the stage, which is decorated with four screens in the shape of a cloud, a moon, a star and a triangle.

The group's tightness is obvious from the opening of the largely up-tempo *Book I: The Tale Of Father Robin*. The rhythm section of Martin Nordrum Kneppen (drums) and Jon André Nilsen (bass) provide a steady backbeat throughout the set. Kneppen is an energetic presence onstage; even when he's not playing a fill, timpani or hi-hat, he's singing along and waving his arms in the air. However, the dancing award goes to flautist and synth wizard Kristoffer Momrak. He regularly whirls and twirls, venturing past frontman and Wobbler singer Andreas Prestmo in the centre of the stage, and skipping over to guitarist Thomas Hagen Kaldhol on the right, kicking his legs out and waving his arms in an almost trance-like state. A good section of the crowd join in with his dance as *Book I* closes with the intense *Unicorn*, during which Prestmo's intricate guitar playing shines. He's one of Norway's outstanding vocalists and is supported by Aleksandra Morozova on backing vocals, their voices complement each other well, particularly in the soaring higher registers.

During the second and third sets, it's keyboardist (and multi-instrumentalist) Håkon Oftung's turn to shine. On *Book II: Ocean Traveller* and *Book III: Magical Chronicle* he plays more solos and fills the band's sound with arpeggios and textures. The haunting *Green Refreshments* from *Book II* is a highlight, but Oftung's stand-out moment of the evening is during *Book III's Cloudship*.

As ...Father Robin enter their final set, Thomas Hagen Kaldhol's mastery of ambient guitar along with enchanting mandolin play is applauded and he beams at those in the crowd immediately in front of him. The ensemble's real strength is how they seamlessly transition between the more melodic passages and the dense, polyrhythmic sections, particularly during the penultimate track, *Empress Of The Sun*.

With the finale, *Lost In The Palace Gardens*, drawing to a close, the crowd give a rapturous, celebratory cheer as the band complete their journey through the trio of records. Father Robin himself would be proud.

ANNE-MARIE FORKER

LESOIR

VENUE	THE WAITING ROOM, LONDON
DATE	30/05/2024

It's been a while since Lesoir last brought their amalgam of melodic art-rock, atmospheric prog and pop-rock sensibilities to the UK from their native Netherlands. A mini-tour back in March was cancelled due to a sudden medical emergency affecting lead guitarist and main composer Ingo Dassen, and this is the rescheduled (and relocated) London date.

"As agreeable as it is to see Lesoir up close and personal, they deserve bigger stages and audiences."

For a band who revel in creating often big, cinematic sounds, The Waiting Room in Stoke Newington, one of London's smallest basement venues, feels a little incongruous. The five-piece spill out from the modest stage, partly to accommodate a very generous amount of equipment, not least the frankly enormous number of effects pedals utilised by every member of the band apart from drummer Bob van Heumen, who triggers backing tracks and samples from behind his kit.

There's a major focus tonight on Lesoir's upcoming album, scheduled for release in September, with a sizable chunk of it getting an airing over the course of the evening. Opening with the title track, *Push Back The Horizon*, with its tribal rhythms, chunky riffing, muscular verses and multipart vocals, it's a powerful start to the set.

From the outset, it's clear that Lesoir are extraordinarily multi-talented and make few compromises in recreating the many layers and sounds of their recorded work — frontwoman Maartje Meessen covers lead vocals, guitar, keyboards and flute, while to her right rhythm guitarist Eleën Bartholomeus wrangles backing vocals and additional keys. As well as providing further backing vocals, bassist Ingo Jetten takes to pedal steel guitar a number of times, including during the sultry, funky breakdown in the middle of new track *You Are The World*, which also features a terrifically catchy, lilting chorus. He also takes over second guitar duties in the instrumental *Dystopia*, which is performed complete with the BBC recording of George Orwell reading from *1984*.

The now fully recovered Dassen is a study of concentration as he provides a rich array of guitar textures and sounds, from the occasional gorgeous guitar solo like his majestic turn in *Somebody Like You* via the sort of ambiance and soundscapes utilised in new instrumental *Aeon* and

If you've got it, flute it.

It's pretty cosy on The Waiting Room's stage!

KEVIN NIXON

aforementioned *Dystopia* through to the great skittering intro of another new track, *Fireflies*.

Older tracks covered include the second song, 2020's *Mosaic*, with its jangling, almost jaunty verses and *Tables Turned* towards the end of the set from their second album, 2013's *Transience*, which features a heavy rock-out sandwiched between slower, sweeping, more reflective sections and closes with a lovely a cappella multipart vocal. Acclaimed epic *Babel* gets a minor look-in, too – not the complete 20 minutes, much to the obvious disappointment of a couple of punters, but just two sections: the light, almost folksy, *New Life* and the bigger, heavier *The Warning*.

Mind your step!

Ingo Jetten has bass duties well covered. And guitar. And backing vox.

Lesoir have an undeniable embarrassment of material to choose from and are as highly accomplished live as they are in the studio, but for every gain there is a loss. Throughout the evening, Meessen's voice remains a clear, powerful element of the overall sound, yet during *Is This It?*, freed from any extraneous instrumental responsibilities and focused on the vocals, she introduces very welcome drama and theatrics to her performance, something that immediately adds an extra dimension. Balancing the demands of the music and the possibilities of live performance is a difficult task, but on tonight's evidence more focus on physical communication with the audience wouldn't go amiss.

As agreeable as it is to see Lesoir up close and personal, both the band and their music deserve somewhat bigger stages and audiences. It's a slow build toward the release of *Push Back The Horizon*, but on the basis of tonight's show, where so many highlights stem from it, including *The Drawer* with its juxtaposition of spacious electronica-leaning verses, fragile chorus and dirty middle section and the almost prog metal strains of current single *As Long As Your Girls Smile*, it will be well worth the wait.

GARY MACKENZIE

Maartje Meessen continues her instrumental juggling act.

AIR

VENUE	ROYAL ALBERT HALL, LONDON
DATE	30/05/2024

The opening notes of free-floating instrumental *La Femme D'Argent* breathe out, unhurried, and instantly a rapt Albert Hall is transported back to 1998, when Air's breakthrough, *Moon Safari*, was ubiquitous. Essentially the *The Dark Side Of The Moon* of chillout, it spawned a glut of imitations, none of which caught its alchemical blend of space rock and electronica, nor its subtle licks of krautrock and psychedelia. The French duo wrapped all these elements in a digestible tablet, then garnished that with an innate grasp of what made Gainsbourg's *Histoire De Melody Nelson* transcend genres. As they play the full album tonight, strains of Neu! and Cluster come through, and Air's love of Pink Floyd and Morricone is evident and elegant. *Moon Safari* remains an enthralling trip.

Nicolas Godin and Jean-Benoît Dunckel, themselves apparently ageless, too, present it 26 years on with a clever, if somehow more admirable than exciting, live show. They're dressed in white, the former moving between keyboards and bass, the latter sticking to his Korgs and Minimoogs. A drummer adds flesh and blood, but Beth Hirsch's lush vocals from *All I Need* and *You Make It Easy* are, sadly, sampled. Yet the razzle-dazzle comes with the visuals: lights and films scurry across the long oblong box in which the band perform, and leap from whooshing sci-fi tropes to plush red Dalí-isms to volcanoes to videogames. Eyes, mouths, flames, constellations: it's highly impressive (albeit perhaps not quite as mind-boggling as the hype had it, and dependent on at which angle to the stage one is sitting) and each track is enhanced by the curated scenes and shimmers. As the crowd in unison goes into rhythmic head-nodding mode, the spirit of early Floyd/Hawkwind gigs winks at the 2020s.

The upbeat flirtations of *Sexy Boy* and *Kelly Watch The Stars* bring a dash of glam, but the second half of *Moon Safari* digs into its dreamier stoner side. There's an ovation, but now Air continue with what's billed as a "greatest hits" set. The snag is that Air peaked with that perfect debut, and though the selections from the likes of *The Virgin Suicides*, *10 000 Hz Legend* and *Talkie Walkie* are charming in their sleepy ambience, there's no denying this concert was front-loaded. Flickers of magic intrigue: *Alone In Kyoto* (famously used in *Lost In Translation*) is more Sakamoto than Sakamoto. The delicacy of *Cherry Blossom Girl* caresses, and there are recurring traces of Tangerine Dream, while encore *Electronic Performers* is a heavier, out-and-out homage to Kraftwerk. And robots.

The exquisite waxings and wanings of the earlier lunar cycles were the truest representation of Air, that purring, pulsing purity a landmark in experimental electronic pop. The vanguard from Versailles honoured that palace here.

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PRESS/HUW LLOYD-JONES

HUW LLOYD-JONES (ALSO EDEN)

The great and good of progressive music give us a glimpse into their prog worlds. **As told to Grant Moon.**

Where's home?
Lydney in Gloucestershire, between the River Severn and the Forest of Dean.

What's your earliest prog memory?
When I was about 10, my older brother bought a car with an eight-track cartridge player. He had two cartridges: Fleetwood Mac's *Greatest Hits* and *Trespass* by Genesis. I fell in love with both but it was the Genesis album that stuck. It's still a favourite today.

What was the first prog album you got?
That same year, 1973, my even older brother bought me *Genesis Live* for my birthday. I loved it and bought *Nursery Cryme* as soon as I could save the money.

And your latest?
I was recently given a copy of

Forget~Me~Nots by [Russian progressive artist] Dikajee. I'm not interested in the 'Is it prog?' debate: whatever it is, it's gorgeous.

Your first proggy gig?
Rush in Bristol, around the time of *A Farewell To Kings* [at the then-Colston Hall, February 26, 1978]. It was absolutely magical! I still have the programme with the puppet king on the cover.

And your most recent?
The Winter's End Festival, just this April. That was also magical.

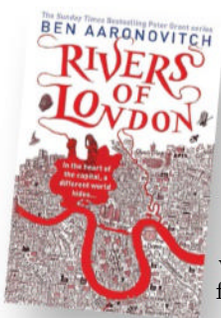
What's the best show you ever saw?
Genesis at Knebworth, 1978. That show will stay with me forever. It was the first time I saw my heroes live.

Your latest proggy discovery?
A duo called Before The Moon Arrived. They're two Spanish girls living in the Netherlands and I am absolutely loving the music I've heard so far.

Your guilty musical pleasure?
I have no guilt when it comes to music! Mika's first album, *Life In Cartoon Motion*, is guaranteed to get me and my kids singing in the car. It's packed full of fun, bouncy tunes delivered in a completely unique style. Love it!

Outside of music, what are you into?
I'm a professional photographer, but I would take photographs for fun, even if it wasn't my living. I tend to leave the expensive gear in the studio and explore the possibilities of my rather elderly iPhone.

What's a good read?



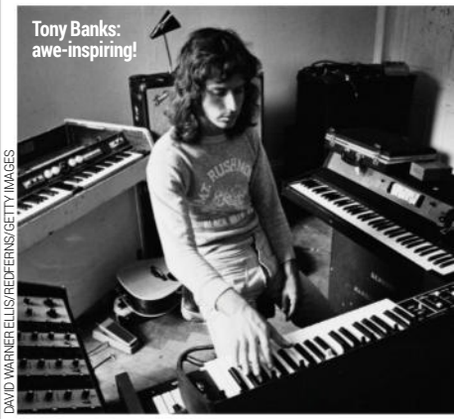
For sheer fun, the *Rivers Of London* series [by Ben Aaronovitch]. Basically it's *Harry Potter* meets [detective show] *Luther*. For something a tad more serious, *A Man Called Ove* [by Fredrik Backman] was my favourite novel for many years.

Have you ever had a prog-related date?
Sort of! In 2006, Also Eden played a small festival, and we were taken with Miriam, the singer of one of the other bands called Beyond The Blue. Sixteen years later I met her again via a dating app. We're still together three years later, though she's yet to fall in love with prog!

> "Genesis at Knebworth, 1978 will stay with me forever. It was the first time I saw my heroes live."

Who's your prog hero?
I could say Peter Gabriel, Thom Yorke or Guy Garvey, but I'll settle for [Winter's End/Summer's End festival founder] Stephen Lambe for doing more to put prog before the people than anyone else I know.

What's the most important piece of prog music?
Today it's *Supper's Ready* by Genesis. Tomorrow, it'll probably be *Close To The Edge* by Yes. The day after...



DAVID WARNER ELLIS/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

Which musician would you most like to work with?
Tony Banks. His keyboard playing is off the scale, obviously, but the sheer creative output of the man is truly awe-inspiring.

What album that gets you in a good mood?
Close To The Edge. I was introduced to it during a warm summer many years ago, so it brings back that time instantly, though I still skip the first two minutes!

What's your favourite prog album cover?
A Trick Of The Tail by Genesis. I remember happy times playing this album with mates and discussing the characters on the beautiful illustration.

And what are you up to at the moment?
I'm super-busy looking for a new photography studio, writing an album with Also Eden for recording during the summer, and we have two Summer's End and one Winter's End festivals in the planning stage [Lloyd-Jones is the festivals' co-promoter]. Plus, I have to actually work to make ends meet!

See www.alsoeden.band for more information.

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